

Thai Protestant Christianity: A Study of Cultural and Theological
Interactions between Western Missionaries (the American
Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship)
and Indigenous Thai Churches (the Church of Christ in Thailand
and the Associated Churches of Thailand-Central).

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Dedication

To my father Charles Richard Hillier.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis constitutes my own research and writing, and has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. All quotations have been distinguished and the source of information acknowledged.

Patricia McLean

February 2002

Abstract

This thesis is a study of Thai Protestant Christianity, with a focus on cultural and theological interactions among western missionaries of the American Presbyterian Mission (APM) and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), and the indigenous Thai churches that the missionaries created: the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) and the Associated Churches of Thailand – Central (ACTC).

The thesis offers a comprehensive historical analysis of the growth of Protestant Christianity in Thailand since the arrival of the first American Presbyterian missionaries in 1840. Recognising that the pre-Second World War history of APM, and the early history of CCT, founded in 1932, already exist, the research concentrates on the post-1945 history of Protestantism in Thailand. This includes the work of OMF that established itself in Thailand in 1952 following the closure of the work of its predecessor organisation, the China Inland Mission, in China. The primary focus on the more recent history of Protestant Christianity in Thailand means that equal attention is given to the emergence of indigenous Thai Christianity, both in CCT, and in ACTC that was constituted in 1985.

Within this historical perspective, the thesis concentrates on the different ways in which missionaries and indigenous Christians have related Christianity to Thai Buddhist culture within the matrix of Thai Buddhism. The thesis compares and contrasts approaches adopted toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism by the missionaries, analysing differences of perspective between APM and OMF missionaries. It goes on to compare these with the evolving patterns of engagement with Thai Buddhism and Thai Buddhist culture among Thai Christians of CCT and ACTC. The thesis demonstrates that there is a distinct difference of approach between APM and OMF missionaries, but that these differences are being resolved in the emerging consensus among Thai Christians of the two traditions as they re-interpret their Christian faith in the Thai context.

The research uses both historical and qualitative research methods. The former are employed for the institutional history of the missions and the churches that they founded. The latter are used for a contextual analysis of the beliefs and practices of foreign missionaries and Thai Christians. The main qualitative research method used has been interviews, but focus groups have also been used insofar as they were practically possible and culturally appropriate.

The thesis comprises nine chapters and is divided into three parts. Part One (Chapters 1 and 2) provides a historical and theological background to the study, introducing Thai Buddhism and the origins of Protestant Christianity in Thailand. Part Two (Chapters 3 to 6) analyses the post-1945 history of APM and OMF in Thailand, with specific reference to their approaches to evangelism, mission-church relations, and attitudes to Thai Buddhist culture. Part Three (Chapters 7 and 8) examines the engagement of CCT and ACTC Thai Christians with Thai Buddhist culture and concludes with a comparison and contrast between missionary and indigenous approaches. The final chapter (Chapter 9) summarises the research findings and discusses the present state of Thai Christianity's contextualisation in Thai Buddhist culture.

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List of Abbreviations

ACT: Associated Churches in Thailand

ACTC: Associated Churches in Thailand – Central

APM: American Presbyterian Mission

CCT: Church of Christ in Thailand

CES: Chinese Evangelisation Society

CIM: China Inland Mission

CMA: Christian & Missionary Alliance

DLP: Dhamma Logos Project

EACC: East Asia Christian Council

MRP: Maen Research Papers

PBC: Phayao Bible College

PCUSA: Presbyterian Church in the United States

UPC: United Presbyterian Church

PHMB: Phayao Home Missions Board

PUA: Payap University Archives

Introduction

This thesis seeks to make a contribution to the understanding of Thai Protestant Christianity. It will do so by looking at the historical development of Thai Protestant Christianity since the mid-nineteenth century, and within this historical framework it will analyse the theological and cultural interactions between Western missionaries and Thai Christians. It will focus on a study of two Protestant missions, the American Presbyterian Mission (APM) and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), and the churches they established, the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) and the Associated Churches in Thailand (ACT).

The first American Presbyterian missionaries arrived in Thailand in 1840; their number rapidly increased and APM established itself as the numerically dominant Protestant mission in Thailand until shortly after the Second World War. It was the principal body responsible for the establishment of the first national Protestant church in Thailand, CCT, in 1932.

OMF entered Thailand in 1952, after leaving China, where it had been known as the China Inland Mission (CIM). By the end of the 1950s it eclipsed APM as the numerically dominant Protestant mission in Thailand. OMF worked amongst the hill tribes in North Thailand, the Muslims in South Thailand, and the Thai and Chinese in thirteen provinces of Central Thailand. It established regional associations of churches in those three areas. The national Associated Churches in Thailand (ACT), consisting of the three regional associations of churches, was constituted in 1985.

APM and OMF accepted different theological and missiological presuppositions. APM understood mission to be ecclesiological in nature and sought to work within CCT. It readily identified with the worldwide ecumenical movement, and encouraged CCT to associate with the World Council of Churches (WCC). OMF, by contrast, was unwilling to identify with WCC and therefore kept its distance from CCT. They deliberately set themselves up as a para-church organisation in Thailand and eventually established an alternative association of Protestant churches, ACT.

The thesis will explore the different approaches that these Western missionaries and Thai Christians have taken toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. It will elucidate ways in which APM's and OMF's approach towards Thai culture and Thai religion have evolved since their arrival in Thailand and analyse how the missions' attitudes have influenced the inculturation process in Thailand and the emergence of Thai Christianity. The thesis will demonstrate that Thai Christians, despite the fact of their having been exposed to different theological perspectives, are reaching a consensus on an appropriate response to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. While they are positive toward Thai culture and willing to explore ways in which Christianity may be inculturated in Thai culture, they are less positive toward Thai Buddhism and have been reluctant to consider ways in which Thai Buddhism might contribute to Thai Christianity. However, the inculturation process appears to be in the preliminary stages and there is evidence that some Thai Christians are beginning to express more positive attitudes toward Thai Buddhism, are willing to look more closely at the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, and consider the implication of this relationship for the inculturation of Christianity in Thailand. In arguing that Thai Christianity has always had the capacity to express itself in indigenous forms relative to Thai Buddhist culture, the thesis will identify ways in which Christianity is in the process of becoming indigenised in Thailand through interaction with Thai Buddhist culture.

1. Research Questions

The present research concentrates on a missiological examination of the history and current state of Christianity in Thailand, with special attention to questions of Christian attitudes toward Thai Buddhism and Thai Buddhist culture. It was decided to examine these issues in two stages, matching the historical development of Protestant Christianity in Thailand. The first phase is concerned with the two Protestant missions, APM and OMF. The following questions were posed: what approach did APM/OMF take to evangelism and mission-church relations? What was APM's/OMF's understanding of, and attitude toward Thai Buddhist culture? Did APM's/OMF's attitude toward Thai Buddhist culture influence their attitude toward

mission-church relations and vice-versa? What was APM's/OMF's understanding of, and attitude toward, Thai Buddhism?

The second phase of the research focuses on the churches established by APM and OMF, CCT and ACTC respectively. It explores the self-statement of groups of Thai Christians from CCT and ACTC. It examined how these Thai Christians understand and express their faith in the Thai Buddhist context, particularly in relation to Thai Buddhism. It assesses the relationship between Thai Christianity and Western Christianity, and Thai Christianity and Thai Buddhism, and asks: in what ways is Thai Christianity similar/dissimilar to Western Christianity, and in what ways is Thai Christianity similar/dissimilar to Thai Buddhism? It then analysed the Thai Christians' understanding of, and attitude toward, Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism, asking the question: what is the Thai Christians understanding of, and attitude toward, Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism?

Finally, the research has compared the missionaries' approach to Thai Buddhist culture and that of the Thai Christians. The research asked: in what way are the Thai Christians' understandings/attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism similar/dissimilar to that of the foreign missionaries? In what way do foreign missionaries influence Thai Christianity?

2. Research Themes

In exploring these questions the research will examine four major issues:

- The research will assess the degree to which equal partnership between overseas mission and indigenous churches was the goal of APM and OMF in relation to CCT and ACTC respectively.
- The research will assess the degree to which a comparative analysis of the missionaries' attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and religion reveals a more positive evaluation on the part of American Presbyterians than on the part of OMF missionaries.
- The research will assess the degree to which Thai Christians draw on their three religious heritages: Thai Christianity, Thai Buddhism and post-war

mission theology, in the process of inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context.

- The research will assess the degree to which Thai Christians are expressing an indigenous understanding of Christianity, independent of western missionaries, with their own theological agenda.

3. Christianity in Thailand

While Thai Buddhism has attracted a great deal of scholarly interest, the study of Thai Christianity is yet in its infancy. There is, however, a significant body of western missionary literature dealing with the history of Thai Christianity, mainly from the missionary perspective, and in more recent times several Thai Christians have begun to write about Thai Christianity from an indigenous perspective. The following paragraphs offer a brief synopsis of these missionary and Thai Christian contributions to our understanding of the history and character of Christianity in Thailand.

A. The American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand

A large number of journals, memoirs, autobiographies and biographies have been published on the early American Presbyterian missionaries. The most substantial of these is Daniel McGilvary's account of his pioneering missionary work in North Thailand: *A Half-Century Among the Siamese and the Lao*.¹ This constitutes a standard history of APM in North Thailand. George McFarland and Kenneth Wells have also made their personal memoirs available to the public.² The work of the

¹ London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912. See also: Cornelia Kneedler Hudson, "A Biography of Daniel McGilvary," unpublished manuscript, n.d.; idem, "Daniel McGilvary in Siam: Foreign Missions, the Civil War and Presbyterian Unity," *American Presbyterians* 69, no. 4 (1991), 283-293; and Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, London, Mexico City, New Delhi, Singapore, Sydney, Toronto: Simon & Schuster Macmillan & Prentice Hall International, 1989), 449-450.

² George B. McFarland, *Reminiscences of Twelve Decades of Service to Siam: 1860-1936*, n.p., n.d. and Kenneth E. Wells, *Some Reflections on Mission Work in Thailand: 1927-1951*, unpublished typescript, 1980. See also: Bertha Blount McFarland, *McFarland of Siam* (New York: Vantage Press,

Eakin family has been well documented³ and biographies have been written about the medical missionaries: Samuel Reynolds House, Stephen Mattoon and Edwin Cort.⁴ Lucy Starling published her own autobiography.⁵

American Presbyterian missionaries have also been responsible for a number of books detailing the American Presbyterian missionaries' impressions of life in Thailand. In 1884 the Presbyterian Board of Publication released *Siam and Laos as Seen by Our American Missionaries*.⁶ Shortly after *Siam or the Heart of Further India* was published.⁷ In 1903 Lillian Curtis wrote a more detailed account of life in North Thailand and the work of the mission entitled *The Laos of North Siam*.⁸ This was followed by Noah McDonald's *Siam: Its Government, Manners, Customs, Etc.*, which proffers a full description of Thai culture and Thai religious practices in North Thailand.⁹ William Clifton Dodd's descriptions of Thai culture are interwoven with his account of his own life story as an itinerant missionary in North Thailand.¹⁰

1958); idem, *Our Garden Was So Fair* (Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1943); and Margaretta Wells, *Siam Story* (New York: Board of Foreign Missions, Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1946).

³ John A. Eakin, "Happy Years and Many of Them: The Story of an Ordinary Man, Chosen, Constrained, Consecrated," typescript, n.p., n.d.; idem, "A Romance of Siamese Christian Life and Work," typescript, n.p., n.d.; Mary A. Eakin, *The Eakin Family in Thailand* (Bangkok: Prachandra Press, 1955), Mary Eakin Laugesen, "Hand to the Plow or Committed to My Trust: A Biography of Dr. John A. Eakin," typescript, n.p., n.d.; and idem, "Man With a Dream: John Anderson Eakin," typescript, n.p., n.d.

⁴ George Haws Feltus, *Samuel Reynolds House* (New York: Revell, 1924); Mary Lourie Mattoon, "A Sketch of the Life and Career of Rev. Stephen Mattoon, D.D.," unpublished typescript, 1928; and Chinda Singhanet, *Dr. Edwin Cort of McCormick Hospital* (Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1962).

⁵ Lucy Starling, *Dawn Over Temple Roofs* (New York: World Horizons, 1960).

⁶ Mary Backus, Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884.

⁷ Mary Lovina Cort, New York: Anson D.F. Randolph & Co., 1886.

⁸ Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1903.

⁹ Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1871.

¹⁰ *The Tai Race* (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1923).

Individual American Presbyterian missionaries have produced substantial historical accounts of APM in Thailand. The earliest account is by J. P. Dripps, *Historical Sketch of the Missions in Siam and Among the Laos under the Care of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church*.¹¹ This was later revised and re-published in 1915.¹² McGilvary's account of the work in North Thailand has already been mentioned. In addition to his personal memoirs of missionary work in North Thailand, McFarland's *Historical Sketch of Protestant Missions in Siam: 1828-1928*, written for APM's centennial celebrations, represents a standard history of Protestant missions in Thailand.¹³ Wells' *History of Protestant Work in Thailand: 1828-1958*, includes an account of the Protestant missions during the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Shorter works on particular APM and/or CCT ministries include: Laurence Judd's, *Chao Rai Thai: Dry Rice Farmers in North Thailand, A Study of Ten Hamlets Practicing Swidden Agriculture and a Restudy Twenty Years Later*,¹⁵ and descriptions of pastoral care in CCT: Kenneth Dobson's, "Acharn: Pastoral Counselling in Pastoral Care in Protestant Churches in Thailand,"¹⁶ and Herbert Swanson's, "Pastoral Care and the Church of Christ in Thailand: A Report on the State of Pastoral Care in the CCT Today."¹⁷

There are also a number of more analytical accounts of APM and CCT, in particular those by Swanson. Swanson's master's thesis, "This Heathen People: The Cognitive

¹¹ Philadelphia: Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, 1881.

¹² J. P. Dripps, *Historical Sketch of the Missions in Siam under the Care of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA*, 7th ed., revised by A. Willard Cooper (Philadelphia: Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church, 1915).

¹³ Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1928.

¹⁴ Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1958, cf., *idem.*, *History of Protestant Work in Thailand: 1828-1966*, unpublished typescript (Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1970).

¹⁵ Bangkok: Suriyabun, 1977. This originated as a doctoral thesis: L. C. Judd, "Chao Rai Thai: Dry Rice Farmers in Northern Thailand" (Ph.D., Cornell University, 1961). See also: *idem.*, *A Vision to Some...A Case Study of Rural Development Activities by a NGO in Thailand: The Rural Life Department of the Church of Christ in Thailand: 1961-1970* (Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1987).

¹⁶ D. Min., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1987.

¹⁷ Unpublished report, Office of History, Church of Christ in Thailand, 1994.

Sources of American Missionary Westernising Activities in Northern Siam: 1867-1889," analyses the cultural and theological presuppositions of American Presbyterian missionaries.¹⁸ Swanson argues that the missionaries divided the world into two incompatible spheres, one good and one bad, and assumed that in order to convert Thai Buddhists to Christianity they must replace Thai Buddhist culture with American Christian culture. In *Krischak Muang Nua*, Swanson critiques the mission's drive to transform Thai Buddhist culture, arguing that the prioritisation of modernisation has had a detrimental effect on the Thai church.¹⁹ Swanson has written a number of works describing the missionaries' role in modernisation.²⁰

American Presbyterian missionaries have also contributed to the growing body of literature on Buddhist-Christian studies. In *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand* Paul Eakin gives an account of Thai Buddhism and suggests ways in which Christians should evangelise Thai Buddhists.²¹ Wells' *Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities* consists of a detailed study of Thai Buddhist

¹⁸ M.A., University of Maryland, 1987.

¹⁹ Bangkok: Chuan Printing Press, 1984.

²⁰ Herbert R. Swanson, "Advocate and Partner: Missionaries and Modernisation in Nan Province, Siam: 1895-1934," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1982), 269-309; idem, "A New Generation: Missionary Education and Changes in Women's Roles in Traditional Northern Thai Society," *Sojourn* 3, no. 2 (1988), 187-206; idem, "Plowshares of Change: Science and Westernisation in Missionary Thought in Thailand," unpublished paper, Fifth International Conference on Thai Studies, London, July 1993; and idem, "This Seed: Missionary Printing and Literature as Agents of Change in Northern Siam: 1892-1926," in Prakai Nontawasee (ed.), *Changes in Northern Thailand and the Shan States: 1886-1940* (Singapore: Southeast Asian Studies Program, 1988), 175-207. Other works on Christian missionaries and modernisation in Thailand include: Joseph Nguyen-van-Khoi, "A Study of the Impact of Christian Missionaries on Education in Thailand: 1662-1910" (Ph.D., Saint Louis University, 1972); Vachara Sindhuprama, "Modern Education and Socio-Cultural Change in Northern Thailand" (Ph.D., University of Hawaii, 1988); Richard L. Popp, "American Missionaries and the Introduction of Western Science and Medicine in Thailand: 1830-1900," *Missiology* 13, no. 2 (1985), 147-157; and B. J. Terwiel, "Acceptance and Rejection: The First Inoculation and Vaccination Campaigns in Thailand," *Journal of the Siam Society* 76 (1988), 183-201.

²¹ Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1956. See also: Paul A Eakin, "A Wheel within the Wheel of the Law in Siam," *International Review of Mission* 20 (1931), 440-449; and idem, "High Criticism of the Buddhist Scriptures in Siam," *The Siam Outlook* 4, no. 2 (1942), 24-28.

beliefs and practices.²² Wells' *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity* describes the differences and similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, and discusses the implications for Christian mission in Thailand.²³ Herbert Grether published a sequence of articles that compare Buddhism and Christianity and discuss evangelistic approaches. His principal interest was a revision of the Thai Bible and his writings address issues of language, translation and the implications for communicating the Gospel in Thailand.²⁴ Seely, who worked with Grether on a revision of the Thai Bible, also published material on this subject.²⁵ In "Thai Buddhism and the Christian Faith" he explores his understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.²⁶ Kosuke Koyama, a fraternal worker from Japan who worked with CCT, also made a significant contribution to an understanding of the difficulties involved in communicating the Gospel to Thai Buddhists and the emergence of a distinctly Thai Christian theology.²⁷

In more recent times Thai scholars have begun writing on different aspects of APM and CCT. Chayan Hiranpan wrote an institutional history of CCT (1934-1994), *Sixty Years of the Church of Christ in Thailand*,²⁸ and Prasit Pongudom a more analytical account of APM and CCT, *A History of the Church of Christ in Thailand*.²⁹ Both

²² Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1939.

²³ *Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 2* (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranasar, 1963).

²⁴ Herbert G. Grether, "The Cross and the Bodhi Tree," *Theology Today* 16, no. 4 (1960), 446-458; idem, "The Revision of the Thai Bible," *The Bible Translator* 8 (1957), 9-19; idem, "Buddhism in Thailand Today," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (1961), 32-40; and idem, "Treasure in Eastern Vessels," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (1963), 6-8.

²⁵ Francis M. Seely, "Some Problems in Translating the Scriptures in Thai," *The Bible Translator* 8, no. 3 (1957), 49-61.

²⁶ *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2-3 (1968), 132-140.

²⁷ Kosuke Koyama, "Aristotelian Pepper and Buddhist Salt," *Practical Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (1967), 97-102; idem, *Water Buffalo Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974); idem, "Water Buffalo Theology - After 25 Years," *McGilvary Journal of Theology* 1 (1999), 63-71; and idem, "Wrath of God vs Thai Theologia Glorise," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (1963), 18-25.

²⁸ Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1997.

²⁹ Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1987, translated by Brenda Noble (unpublished typescript: 1998).

make a significant contribution to the study of APM and CCT. Both, however, are only available in Thai. English language works include those by Saad Chaiwan, Virat Koydul and Maen Pongudom, each of whom has written critical analyses of APM and CCT. In “A Study of the Impact of Christian Missions on Thai Culture from the Historical Perspective,” Saad argues that Christian missionaries have forced Thai converts to reject their own culture as evil and to adopt Western culture along with Christianity.³⁰ In “The History and Growth of the Church of Christ in Thailand: An Evangelistic Perspective” Virat argues that the lack of a comprehensive church growth philosophy has contributed to the slow growth of the church in Thailand. He suggests a number of church growth principles that might be adopted by CCT.³¹ Maen’s doctoral thesis, “Apologetic and Missionary Proclamation: Exemplified by American Presbyterian Missionaries to Thailand (1828-1978), Early Church Apologists: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, A Thai-Buddhist Monk-Apologist,” consists of a detailed study of the apologetic approach of American Presbyterian missionaries, early church fathers and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a renowned Thai monk.³²

This brief survey of literature dealing with APM indicates that scholarly attention has concentrated mainly on eighteenth and early nineteenth century developments, in contrast to which there is a dearth of literature on APM/CCT after the Second World War. Chayan’s institutional history is brief and lacks an analytical approach. Although Prasit’s account is more reflective it contains only two chapters on the period after the Second World War. Similarly Maen’s analysis of the apologetic approach of American Presbyterian missionaries prioritises the period before the Second World War and offers only a brief review of the period after Second World War. Other works on APM/CCT after the Second World War, such as those by Swanson, Saad and Virat, have not analysed APM’s approach to Thai Buddhist

³⁰ Th.D., Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, 1985. See also: Saad Chaiwan, *The Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand* (Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1975) and idem, “A Study of Christian Mission in Thailand,” *East Asia Journal of Theology* 2, no. 1 (1984): 62-74.

³¹ Th. M., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990.

³² Ph.D., University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 1979.

culture in any depth or explored the relationship between the American Presbyterian missionaries' and Thai Christians' attitudes towards Thai culture and Thai religion.

There are three principal reasons that APM is worthy of a more detailed study. Firstly, it was the dominant Protestant mission in Thailand from the mid nineteenth century until shortly after the Second World War, and made a significant contribution to the emergence of the Thai church and to Thai Christianity. Secondly, the interactions between APM and CCT stand as a notable example of the American Presbyterian's policy of integrating its missions into associated churches. The policy was given a more radical interpretation in Thailand than in other places where APM operated, and yet no study has addressed the evolution of the relationship between APM and CCT. Thirdly, a few American Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand developed a particular interest in Thai Buddhism and inter-religious dialogue that eventuated in their hosting the WCC consultation: "Dialogue in Community" in Chiangmai, Thailand (1977).³³ Hitherto there has been no research, other than Maen's, on APM's approach to Thai Buddhism.

B. The China Inland Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in Thailand

The work of CIM, which later became OMF, has been well documented. Broomhall provides a comprehensive account of the history of CIM, drawing on both earlier publications and archive resources.³⁴ Other works by Armerding, Mackay and Austin offer more analytical accounts.³⁵ The work of OMF in Thailand has not attracted the

³³ *Dialogue in Community: Statements and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiangmai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977) and *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979). See Chapter Two: 4. B. 2., "The Christian Response to Other Faiths."

³⁴ A.J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, (7 vols), (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981-1987).

³⁵ Hudson Taylor Armerding, "The China Inland Mission and Some Aspects of its Work" (Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1948); Moira J. Mackay, "Faith and Facts in the History of the China Inland Mission" (M.Litt., Aberdeen University, 1981); and Alwyn Austin, "Pilgrims and Strangers: The

same interest. There are a number of biographies of OMF missionaries³⁶ and several OMF missionaries have written descriptive accounts of OMF's work among the hill-tribes. These include: *North Thailand, the Golden Clime*;³⁷ *Ascent to the Tribes: Pioneering in North Thailand*;³⁸ and *The New Trail Among the Tribes in North Thailand*.³⁹ There has been little, however, written about the work of OMF in Central Thailand. Dorothy Beugler, a pioneer OMF missionary in Central Thailand who had previously worked in China with CIM, published a description of the geographical, cultural, historical and religious background of Central Thailand, entitled *Central Thailand: Heart of the Orchid*.⁴⁰ Beugler also produced a pamphlet, *The Religion of the Thai in Central Thailand*, describing the beliefs and practices of Thai Buddhists in Central Thailand.⁴¹ This was widely distributed among OMF missionaries in Central Thailand. Catherine Maddox who, with her husband Chris Maddox, founded the first OMF Christian hospital in Central Thailand, published a history of the hospital, *Paddy Field Hospital*,⁴² and a description of the work of medical missionaries in Thailand, *Healing Hands in Thailand*.⁴³ OMF has published two brief accounts of its work in Thailand: *One Small Flame* (1978),⁴⁴ and *Dawn Wind*

China Inland Mission in Britain, Canada, the United States and China 1865-1901" (Ph.D., York University, Ontario, 1996).

³⁶ Allan Crane, *Fierce the Conflict: The Story of Lillian Hamer* (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Co., 1960); M. Heimbach, *At Any Cost: The Story of Graham Ray Orpin* (London: China Inland Mission/Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1964), reprinted with an additional chapter as: M. Heimbach, *At Any Cost: The Story of Graham Ray Orpin* (London: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1976); Phyllis Thompson, *Minka and Margaret: The Heroic Story of Two Women Missionaries Martyred by Bandits* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976); and Carolyn L. Canfield, *One Vision Only: A Biography of Isobel Kuhn*, n.p., n.d.

³⁷ Isobel Kuhn, London: China Inland Mission, 1954.

³⁸ idem, London: China Inland Mission/Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1956.

³⁹ Otto Scheuzger, translated by Joyce Baldwin (London: China Inland Mission, 1963). Republished as *The New Trail*, translated by Joyce Baldwin (London: OMF Books, 1976).

⁴⁰ London: China Inland Mission, 1954.

⁴¹ Unpublished typescript, n.d.

⁴² London: Lutterworth Press, 1962.

⁴³ Westchester, Illinois: Good News Publishers, 1964.

⁴⁴ Sevenoaks, Kent: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1978.

(1980).⁴⁵ OMF publications also include the journals: *China's Millions*, *The Millions*, and *East Asia Millions*. These contain multiple short articles that address the work of OMF in Central Thailand.

Alex Smith, who worked with OMF in Central Thailand, is a prolific writer. A keen advocate of Donald McGavran's church growth principles, he wrote several accounts of his own endeavours to implement these principles in Thailand, recommending how they should be applied in the Thai Buddhist context.⁴⁶ His larger work, *Siamese Gold, A History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretative Analysis 1816-1982*, attempts to explain why the Thai church has grown at certain points in history and not at others.⁴⁷ John Davis, an OMF missionary who worked in North Thailand, has written a more scholarly work that critiques the approach that evangelical Christian missionaries have taken toward Thai Buddhist culture, *Poles Apart? Contextualising the Gospel*.⁴⁸ He suggests ways in which Christianity might be inculturated in the Thai Buddhist context.

It is apparent that there is a lack of analytical historical and theological research on OMF in Central Thailand. None of the literature draws on the rich archive resources or oral historiography available.⁴⁹ There has been no analysis of the emergence of

⁴⁵ Sevenoaks, Kent: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1980.

⁴⁶ Alex G. Smith, *The Gospel Facing Buddhist Cultures*, *Asian Perspectives* No. 27 (Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1960); idem, "How to Multiply Churches by Film Evangelism," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1976), 167-172; idem, *Strategy to Multiply Rural Churches: A Central Thailand Case Study* (Bangkok: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1977); and idem, "Insights for Frontier Missions to Theravada Buddhists," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (1993), 125-128.

⁴⁷ Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1982. This originated as a doctoral thesis: idem, "A History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretative Analysis, 1816-1980" (D. Miss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980).

⁴⁸ Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1993. This originated as a doctoral thesis: idem, "Towards a Contextualised Theology for the Church in Thailand" (Ph.D., Birmingham University, 1990).

⁴⁹ The Payap University Manuscript Division holds a small collection of OMF archives. The vast majority of OMF's historical documents are held at their national office in Bangkok. See Chapter One: 5. A. 1., "Historical Sources." In addition Alex Smith conducted individual interviews with a

ACTC, the evolution of the relationship between OMF and ACTC, or OMF's approach to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. Moreover, there are a number of reasons why OMF in Central Thailand deserves a more detailed study. Firstly, OMF Thailand has been the numerically dominant Protestant mission in Thailand since the mid 1950s, eclipsing APM, and the majority of OMF's missionaries have been located in Central Thailand. Secondly, OMF has had a significant influence on the emergence of a distinct evangelical Protestant Christian community in Thailand, ACT, founded two evangelical theological institutions and contributed to the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand.

C. Recent Contributions by Thai Scholars

During the latter half of the twentieth century Thai scholars have begun to contribute to the literature on Christian mission history, church history and Thai Christianity. A number of theses have endeavoured to relate Biblical studies to the Thai context. Maen's "Creation of Man: Theological Reflections Based on Northern Thai Folktales," compared the Genesis creation narrative and Northern Thai folktales about the beginning of the world; he argued that the narratives share common elements and suggested that Thai Christianity would be enriched by a fuller engagement with, and adaptation of, aspects of these indigenous creation stories.⁵⁰ Chaiwat Chawmuangman, "A Comparison of the Nature of Parables in the Synoptic Gospels and the Nature of Parables in Thai Culture," made a similar study of the nature of parables in the synoptic gospels and the use of parables in the Thai church.⁵¹ Seree Lorgunpai's "World Lover, World Leaver: The Book of Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism," explored the similarities between Buddhism and Ecclesiastes, arguing that similarities between the two were a potential source of Christian-Buddhist dialogue.⁵²

number of OMF missionaries in Thailand in order to gather oral histories. Although he has not analysed the material gleaned, or utilised it in his published histories he did make it available to the author.

⁵⁰ *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1985): 222-227.

⁵¹ Th.D., Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, Philippine Branch, 1993.

⁵² Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 1995 and Seree Lorgunpai, "The Book of Ecclesiastes and Thai Buddhism," *Asia Journal of Theological Reflection* 8, no. 1 (1994): 155-162.

Thai scholars have adopted a different approach to the study of Christianity in Thailand than that taken by Western missionaries. They have shown little interest in the history of the missionary movement and the early historical development of the Thai church, and instead have preferred to address more contextual issues. A number of studies have explored the influence of Thai culture on the Thai church. Chaiyun Ukosakul's "A Study of the Patterns of Detachment in Interpersonal Relationships in a Local Thai Church," draws on Thai cultural studies to explain the particular patterns of relationships within the Thai church.⁵³ In "The Issues of Church Management in the Thai Church," Boonratna Boayen examines the question of leadership in the Thai church.⁵⁴ Somchart Cha-umthong's "The Authority of a Thai Protestant Pastor" seeks to establish the credibility of Christian pastors in a Buddhist country that readily recognises the authority of Buddhist monks but not that of Christian ministers.⁵⁵ Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons' "A Contextual Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling in Northern Thailand," and Suwimon Kongkangwanchoke's "A Guide for Christian Nurturing Ministry Through the Local Church in Thailand," each examined the issue of pastoral care in the Thai church.⁵⁶ Thai Christians have shown a particular interest in evangelism.⁵⁷ Nantachai

⁵³ Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1994. See also: Chaiyun Ukosakul, "A Turn from the Wheel to the Cross: Crucial Considerations for Discipling New Thai Christians" (Th.M., Boston University, 1995).

⁵⁴ D. Min., School of Theology at Claremont, 1982.

⁵⁵ M.Th., Columbia Theological Seminary, 1971.

⁵⁶ Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons, "A Contextual Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling in Northern Thailand" (D.Min., California Graduate School of Theology, 1992); idem, "Pastoral Counselling for Thai Women in Thailand" (STM, Andover Newton Theological School, n.d.); idem, "Thai Resources for Pastoral Counselling," *PTCA Bulletin* 10, no. 2 (1997): 14-18; and Suwimon Kongkangwanchoke, "A Guide for Christian Nurturing Ministry Through the Local Church in Thailand" (D.Min., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995).

⁵⁷ Saad Chaiwan, *The Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand* (Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1975); Wan Petchasongkram, *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree*, translated and edited by Francis E. Hudgins (Bangkok: Thai Gospel Press, 1975); Siraporn Sahitsilatham, "The Importance of the Gospel and Effective Ways to Evangelise Thai Buddhists" (M.Div., Asian Centre for Theological Studies and Mission, Seoul, 1989); Nantachai Mejudhon, "Meekness: A New Approach to Christ Witness to the

Mejudhon's "Meekness: A New Approach to Buddhists in Thailand" critiques the foreign missionaries approach to Thai Buddhist culture and methods of evangelising Thai Christians and proposes an approach that is more appropriate to the Thai context.⁵⁸ Nantachai suggests that evangelism in Thailand should be characterised by meekness in contrast to the aggressive attitudes that typified missionary approaches in the past. Thai Christians have also been concerned to develop an appropriate response to the social and political injustices evident in modern Thai society. Koson Srisang, General Secretary of CCT between 1974 and 1979, showed a particular interest in these issues. His doctoral thesis, "Dhammocracy in Thailand: A Study of Social Ethics as a Hermeneutic of Dhamma," argues that Christian theology makes a definite contribution to politics, in particular social ethics.⁵⁹ His ideas have not, however, been unanimously embraced by Thai Christians in Thailand.

D. Two Seminal Works on Thai Christianity

Two recent doctoral theses have made a particular contribution to our understanding of Thai Christianity: one, "Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand," by Philip Hughes, a sociologist;⁶⁰ the other, "Protestant Christianity and the Transformation of Northern Thai Culture: Ritual Practice, Belief and Kinship," by Graham Forham, an anthropologist.⁶¹ The current research sets out to examine

Thai People" (D. Miss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1997); and Wannapa Reongjareonsook, "Effective Strategies for Bangkok Evangelism" (D.Min., Columbia Biblical Seminary and Graduate School of Missions, 1997).

⁵⁸ D. Miss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 1977.

⁵⁹ Ph.D., University of Chicago, 1974. See also: idem, "Free and Compassionate: A Perspective on Religious Foundations of Political Ethics," in Yeow Choo Luk, *Doing Theology With Asian Resources: Theology and Politics* (Singapore: ATESEA, 1993); idem, (ed.), *Liberating Discovery: An Asian Enquiry into Theological Reflection on Tourism* (Bangkok: Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism, 1986); Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis, "In Search of an Integral Liberation: A Study of the Thai Struggle for Social Justice from a Christian Perspective – The Contemporary Thai Farmers' Movement as a Case Study" (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982); and Prakai Nontawasee, "Jesus Empowering Women," *PTCA Bulletin* 12, no. 1,2 (1999): 8-9.

⁶⁰ Ph.D., South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, Chiangmai, 1983.

⁶¹ Ph.D., Department of Anthropology, The University of Adelaide, 1991.

whether the empirical evidence generated through historical and qualitative research methods confirms or challenges the findings of these two theses.

A. Hughes: “Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand.”

1. A Summary of Hughes’ Research Questions, Methods and Conclusions

Hughes states that the purpose of his thesis is “to contribute to the debate on the relationship between Christianity and culture.”⁶² In order to achieve this aim Hughes conducted a case study in North Thailand among Thai Buddhists, Thai Christians and American missionaries working in the CCT. The Thai Christians and Thai Buddhists were students at Payap University. The Thai Christians were members of a number of different churches, including the CCT.

The analysis of the relationship between Christianity and culture is restricted to a comparison of the soteriological beliefs of Thai Buddhists, Thai Christians, and American missionaries, the working definition of soteriology being “that area of belief concerning what is the nature of and what are the essential components of a worth-while existence; and what are the basic problems in and threats to the attainment of this existence.”⁶³ Hughes maintains that it also includes “beliefs concerning the means to attain this worth-while existence and its components, and means of dealing with the basic problems in and threats to the attainment of this existence.”⁶⁴ The research set out to assess how far Christianity has effected pre-existing Thai Buddhist soteriological beliefs. Does Christianity entail a rejection of those beliefs, a transformation of them, or has no effect on them at all.⁶⁵ To compare Thai Buddhists’, Thai Christians’ and American missionaries’ soteriological beliefs, Hughes used a list of twenty terminal values which he described as desirable “end-

⁶² Hughes, “Christianity and Culture,” 2.

⁶³ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 39

states of existence.”⁶⁶ The list had been compiled by two Thai social scientists, Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn. In addition Hughes included an unspecified number of values that he considered to represent “the conceptions of the ultimate worth-while life as advocated by Christianity and Buddhism.”⁶⁷

Questionnaires were the principal means of data collection. Hughes argued that “Questionnaires produce clear, easily comparable expressions of beliefs in large numbers from many different subjects. The possibility of statistically analysing the responses is particularly helpful in comparing groups of people and in analysing variations in belief against independent variables.”⁶⁸ He was, however, aware of the limitations of questionnaires, and mentions the following disadvantages:

[F]irstly, the categories of response are fixed by the researcher, and thus tend to skew the expressions of belief to fit the researcher’s framework. Secondly, questionnaires are not as flexible as interviews. They do not allow the researcher to pursue answers that he does not understand, or to check why a certain person has responded to an item in a particular way.⁶⁹

Recognising the disadvantages, Hughes complemented his quantitative research with a variety of other methods including participant observation and individual interviews. However, the data generated from the questionnaires dominated the analysis and resulting research conclusions.

The questionnaires asked the respondents to rate the terminal values identified by Komin and Smuckarn and those additional values included by Hughes.⁷⁰ The values

⁶⁶ Milton Rokeach, in Hughes, “Christianity and Culture,” 65. Milton Rokeach, an American social psychologist, coined the term terminal-values and identified eighteen, which he considered to have some validity in all cultures (Milton Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 1973)). Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, two Thai social scientists, prepared a similar list specific to Thai people. Hughes used Komin and Smuckarn’s list in his research (Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, *Thai Values and Value Systems: A Survey Instrument* (Bangkok: NIDA, 1979), in Thai).

⁶⁷ Hughes, “Christianity and Culture,” 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Suntaree Komin and Snit Smuckarn, *Thai Values and Value Systems: A Survey Instrument* (Bangkok: NIDA, 1979), in Thai.

were related to different areas of soteriological belief. Hughes explored what he described as non-religious soteriological beliefs and religious soteriological beliefs. Among the former he included beliefs about what constitutes a worth-while existence and the causes and means of dealing with difficulties, such as personal problems, sickness and road accidents. Among the latter he included specific religious beliefs related to Buddhist and Christian doctrines, for example, beliefs about *kamma*, merit and salvation.

On the basis of his analysis of the non-religious soteriological beliefs of Thai Buddhists, Thai Christians and American missionaries, Hughes concluded that Christianity has had little impact on the non-religious beliefs of Thai Christians.⁷¹ “Being ‘Thai’ or ‘American’ is a more reliable predicator of one’s values” he argued “than being ‘Christian’ or ‘Buddhist.’”⁷² The latter distinction only became evident in relation to religious beliefs: “The major significant differences between Christians and Buddhists occur only when reference is made to specific religious institutions, ceremonies, and explicit doctrines.”⁷³ Hughes finds these conclusions confirmed in his analysis of religious soteriological beliefs. He argued that Christianity is assimilated in the Thai Buddhist context only in so far as it is seen to contribute to the attainment of Thai religious values, such as a sense of coolness and calmness.⁷⁴ He contended that the differences between Thai Buddhists’ and Thai Christians’ soteriological beliefs concerning karma and merit, “[I]s one of degree rather than kind.”⁷⁵ Thai Christians, as much as Thai Buddhists, believe the Thai Buddhist maxim: ‘If you do good you will receive good and that if you do evil you will receive evil.’⁷⁶ He maintained that for Thai Christians prayer to God replaces Thai Buddhist rituals and magic. He insisted that Thai Christians do not consider sin to be the principal problem, do not consider forgiveness of sins to be important and are more

⁷¹ Hughes, “Christianity and Culture,” 158.

⁷² Ibid., 129.

⁷³ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 170.

likely to believe that God forgives sin because he loves men and women than that God forgives sin because of Christ's death and resurrection.⁷⁷ Hughes concluded that Christianity has been assimilated in the Thai Buddhist context in so far as it affirms, and can be interpreted in terms of, the Thai Buddhist concepts of: *kamma*, merit, and spiritual patronage. Aspects of Christianity that could not be assimilated within those Buddhist themes he deems to be unimportant to Thai Christianity and describes such theology as 'learnt' or 'banked' theology, meaning that they have been superficially adopted by Thai Christians but have little influence on Thai Christians, since they have not been assimilated fully into Thai Christianity.⁷⁸

2. A Critique of Hughes' Thesis

The principal weakness of Hughes' research is his methodological decision to prioritise quantitative data analysis over qualitative. He consistently prioritises quantitative data generated from questionnaires over qualitative data generated during participant observation and individual interviews. Information gathered during participant observation and individual interviews is inadequately analysed, rarely features in the discussion of the research findings, and is not allowed to challenge conclusions reached following an analysis of the questionnaires. Consequently, having acknowledged the disadvantages of relying only on quantitative analysis, he fails adequately to resolve this problem.

The weaknesses of Hughes' research methodology critically influenced the generation and analysis of the research data and research conclusions. Firstly, Hughes decision to employ the terminal values identified by Komin and Smuckarn meant that his research primarily compared Thai Buddhists,' Thai Christians' and American missionaries' rating of Thai cultural values. Not surprisingly Hughes found significant similarities between the responses from Thai Buddhists and Thai Christians. Although he included additional values that he deemed relevant to Buddhism and Christianity, many of the religious beliefs and corresponding terminal

⁷⁷ Ibid., 188.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 218. Hughes borrows the term 'banked' from Paulo Friere (Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Penguin, 1972).

values that respondents were asked to rate were also highly prized cultural attributes, such as a sense of coolness and calmness. Secondly, Hughes' decision to provide fixed categories of response on the questionnaires, some of which were ambiguous, meant that he had to offer his own interpretation of those responses. The researcher was unable to ask the respondent for clarification and the respondents were unable to qualify their answers. For example, Hughes examined what Thai Buddhists and Thai Christians considered to be the possible causes of road traffic accidents. Although the questionnaires indicated that Thai Christians are less likely than Thai Buddhists to attribute causation to *kamma*, Hughes concluded that Thai Christians have merely rejected the term '*kamma*,' because of its association with Buddhism, not the concept that previously evil acts may be the cause of road traffic accidents, which they continue to affirm.⁷⁹ Thirdly, Hughes repeatedly downplays the differences between Thai Buddhism and Thai Christianity and understates the significance of these differences. For example he concludes that the differences between the Thai Buddhist and Thai Christian understanding of merit-making is "one of degree rather than kind."⁸⁰ His research findings, however, disclose that while 34 percent of Thai Buddhist respondents agreed that one of the reasons to make merit was "to ensure the next life is good," only 6 percent of Thai Christians affirmed that response. While 18 percent of Thai Buddhists agreed that they make merit in order to go to heaven, only 6 percent of Thai Christians expressed this belief.⁸¹ Fourthly, Hughes decision to classify some Thai Christian beliefs, such as the belief that forgiveness of sins is mediated through the person and work of Christ, as 'learnt' or 'banked' theology involves a value judgement that is not supported by the evidence.

The author's own research indicates that complex beliefs, such as those examined by Hughes, are often expressed in an ambiguous form, respondents affirming more than one understanding of reality. Questionnaires that require respondents to select only one response, and do not enable respondents to qualify that response, are consequently ill-equipped to elicit a comprehensive statement of an individuals

⁷⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 172.

⁸¹ Ibid., 171.

beliefs. By contrast, individual interviews allow the interviewee to elaborate and qualify their response to a particular question. They also enable the researcher to probe the different, some times conflicting beliefs that interviewees express, and to explore the relationship between those beliefs.

Hughes' research makes a positive contribution to the study of Thai Christianity in that it identifies similarities between Thai Christianity and Thai Buddhism and suggests ways in which Thai Christianity has been influenced by Thai Buddhism. However, he reduces the complex relationship between Thai Christianity and Thai Buddhism to a simple interaction in which Christian beliefs are assimilated only in so far as they relate to Thai Buddhist beliefs. According to Hughes Christian beliefs that do not relate to Thai Buddhist beliefs remain unassimilated, appearing as 'learned' or 'banked' theology.

B. Fordham: "Protestant Christianity and the Transformation of Northern Thai Culture: Ritual Practice, Belief and Kinship."

1. A Summary of Fordham's Research Questions, Methods and Conclusions

Fordham investigated why Thai Buddhists converted to Christianity during the 1880s and the beliefs and rituals that subsequently developed amongst Thai Christians. He combined a number of different methodologies, drawing on historical data in order to examine the origins of the church and conducting case studies in two villages, one Christian and one Buddhist, in order to explore contemporary Thai Christianity. The case studies utilised qualitative rather than quantitative data analysis, relying on participant observation and interviews to generate data.

Fordham rejects both the theory that Thai Buddhists converted to Christianity for material gain, and the theory that Christianity was imposed onto relatively passive subjects.⁸² He critiques the former on grounds that it "disregards pre-existing

⁸² Those who argue that Thai Buddhists converted to Christianity for material gain include: P. J. Hughes, *Proclamation and Response: A Study of the History of the Christian Faith in Northern*

conceptual systems and denies the integrity of its subjects;”⁸³ and the later on grounds that it “regards its subjects as acted upon rather than as acting, a *tabula rasa* onto which Christianity and Western culture may be inscribed.”⁸⁴ It argues instead that mass conversions to Christianity in North Thailand at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century were triggered by the socio-political context. At that time North Thailand was characterised by political instability and economic deprivation. A number of revolutionary movements came into being, and Christianity was one of many social movements that flourished, “a result of the same political and economic forces which inspired other contemporary forms of peasant activity.”⁸⁵ Thai Buddhists believed Christ to be the Buddhist Messiah and Christianity took the form of a Christian Messianic movement.

Fordham contends that Thai Buddhist converts to Christianity did not understand Christianity to be in opposition to, or discontinuous with, Thai Buddhism; rather, they understood Christianity to be a messianic movement standing in continuity with Thai Buddhism. He maintains that their understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity enabled them to incorporate Thai Buddhist beliefs and rituals into Christianity. This resulted in a synthesis between Buddhism and Christianity: “In this synthesis both Buddhist beliefs and practices and introduced Christianity have been transformed.”⁸⁶ The synthesis that Fordham explores is, however, dependent on two factors: the Thai Christians’ understanding of the continuity between Buddhism and Christianity and their relative independence from foreign missionaries.

Thailand (Chiangmai: Manuscript Division, Payap University, 1982); Hughes, “Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand;” Philip J. Hughes, “The Assimilation of Christianity in the Thai Culture,” *Religion* 14 (1984); P. J. Hughes, “Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 73, no. 1-2 (1985); Smith, *Siamese Gold, A History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretative Analysis 1816-1982*; and Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History*.

⁸³ Fordham, “Protestant Christianity,” 190.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

Fordham understands the term synthesis to entail a transformation that, following Sahlin, he describes as a process through which a peoples' classification system changes, some elements acquiring new meanings and other elements being reassessed in light of these new meanings.⁸⁷ Fordham argues that such a transformation "takes place at a deep structural level which is not directly accessible, except through the window of human symbolic activity."⁸⁸ He analyses the ritual practices of Thai Christians as a means by which Thai Christians have transformed Northern Thai culture, arguing that "the exegesis of ritual performance is a way of eliciting a peoples' most deeply held beliefs and values."⁸⁹

Fordham examines two Christian rituals in particular, the mortuary and ancestor rituals. He demonstrates that "through the medium of the Christian mortuary rite the deceased are transformed from living beings to deceased ancestors. As ancestors, they are conceptualised as retaining a human form and as remaining interested in, and significant for, the world of the living."⁹⁰ He shows that "through the performance of the ritual directed to Christian ancestors, Northern Thai Christians demonstrate their descent relation from ancestral Christians and constitute relations amongst themselves as a united group sharing kin relations."⁹¹ He concludes that the Thai Christian beliefs and rituals analysed are significantly different to those of Thai Buddhists, foreign missionaries and formal teaching of the CCT.⁹²

2. A Critique of Fordham's Thesis

Fordham utilises a methodological approach that is more appropriate to the study of Thai Christianity than that of Hughes. His qualitative analysis allows him to expound a more accurate understanding of the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism

⁸⁷ Ibid., 32. See: M. Sahlin, "Other Times, Other Customs: The Anthropology of History," *American Anthropologist* 85, no. 3 (1983)

⁸⁸ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 259.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁹¹ Ibid., 42.

⁹² Ibid., 41, 253, 208.

in Thailand. His research, however, raises a number of questions that will be addressed in this thesis. Firstly, has the synthesis that he describes occurred within the wider body of the CCT? This question is significant given that Fordham examines the beliefs and practices of Christians in one village only, a village that was in conflict with the CCT authorities over so called 'syncretistic' beliefs and practices. Secondly, has a similar synthesis occurred where new converts do not understand there to be any continuity between Buddhism and Christianity, but think of them as being in conflict with, and opposed to, one another? Thirdly, has a similar synthesis occurred where missionaries are in close proximity to Thai Christians and seek to persuade them that conversion to Christianity necessitates a rejection of Buddhism?

4. Theoretical Considerations

A. Culture and Religion

The term culture may be used to refer to two quite different entities. In popular usage it denotes 'highbrow culture,' that is an appreciation of classical music, opera, theatre, literature, poetry and the arts. According to this usage culture is deemed to be the aspiration of many, partaken of by the few. Bevans contends that,

Within this understanding of culture, one became 'cultured,' and so listened to Bach and Beethoven, read Homer and Dickens and Flaubert, and appreciated Van Dyck, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt. The person of culture, in other words, nourished oneself on the great human achievements of the West.⁹³

Defining culture in terms of the great human achievements of the West entails a normative rather than empirical understanding of culture. In doing so it mitigates against a pluralist view of culture, advancing instead a view of culture that can not but claim to be universalist.

Contemporary social sciences have proffered an alternative definition of culture, one that has now been widely accepted by other academic disciplines including theology. Their definition of culture is far more inclusive, referring to the totality of beliefs, values and knowledge that constitute the basis of social action in any given society,

⁹³ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 7.

whether that of the West or the non-West, the 'highbrow' or otherwise. Culture is understood to be intrinsic to society, a shared culture uniting a society and distinguishing it from other societies. Thus the pioneer anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor (1832-1917) defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man (*sic*) as a member of society."⁹⁴ Contra to popular usage of the term culture this definition entails a pluralist view of culture that rejects claims to universalism by any one culture.

More recent elaborations of this understanding of culture have focused on the complex matrix of beliefs, values, and knowledge that lie at the heart of any society and the manner in which these are embodied and transmitted by a system of symbols. Thus Clifford Geertz described culture as,

[A]n historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and their attitudes towards, life.⁹⁵

This understanding of culture has enabled social scientists to distinguish between different levels of culture. These different levels of culture are often discussed in terms of concentric circles. The innermost circle is concerned with the complex matrix of beliefs, values and knowledge that lie at the heart of a culture. The middle circle with the system of symbols that Geertz maintains, "communicate, perpetuate and develop" a society's understanding of ultimate reality. While the outermost circle is concerned with the behaviour patterns evident in any given culture. Shorter describes these three levels of culture as the phenomenological, the symbolic and the cognitive. He maintains that the phenomenological level refers to "all that has to do with material life, technology and behaviour," the symbolic level "relates to the realm of ideas," while the cognitive level concerns "the underlying meanings and values."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Edward. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.

⁹⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 89.

⁹⁶ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 35.

This understanding of culture, first developed by the social sciences, has been employed by theologians, whether Ecumenical, Evangelical or Roman Catholic, in their exploration of the relationship between Gospel and culture. The WCC Consultation in May/June 1984 at Piano in Italy was devoted to exploring the relationship between Gospel and culture. The findings of this consultation were presented in the *International Review of Mission* in April 1985.⁹⁷ WCC Conferences in Bangkok (1973) and Nairobi (1975) continued to debate the issues. Evangelicals began to explore the relationship between Gospel and culture at the International Congress on World Evangelisation held at Lausanne (1974) that produced the *Lausanne Covenant*. Numerous subsequent gatherings have sustained the debate initiated at Lausanne and analysed the relationship between the Gospel and specific individual cultures around the world. Vatican II marked a turning point in the Roman Catholic understanding of Gospel and culture. Arbuckle, charting the evolution of the Roman Catholic understanding, argues that, "The Council laid the foundation for the re-emergence of a more flexible, apostolic relationship between the Gospel and cultures."⁹⁸

The phrase 'Gospel and Culture' implies a relationship that is not immediately obvious. Theologians, eager to analyse the nature of that relationship, have had to begin by defining the term religion and analysing the relationship between culture and religion, before exploring the relationship between culture and the Christian religion. Discourse concerning the definition of religion is diverse and wide ranging. Social scientists, such as Geertz, have defined religion as an aspect of culture, a system of symbols, which embody and reinforce a society's ultimate beliefs. Geertz states:

A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (*sic*) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with

⁹⁷ "Gospel and Culture," *International Review of Mission* 294, (1985).

⁹⁸ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990), 15.

such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.⁹⁹

This definition places religion at the very heart of a culture, since it maintains that religion is fundamentally concerned with a society's understanding of ultimate reality, beliefs which lie at the deepest level of culture.¹⁰⁰

Theologians have employed the social scientists' understanding of religion in order to advance the discussion concerning the relationship between the Gospel and culture. They accept with social scientists such as Geertz that religion is the deepest element in a culture embodying a society's beliefs about ultimate reality, beliefs which are translated firstly into symbolic form and then into practical behaviour. Thus Schreiter, discussing the centrality of religion to a culture, contends, "Religion is more than a view of life – it is also a way of life... For many it is a way of being and living so tied up with being part of a particular culture that it is impossible to imagine living outside the culture."¹⁰¹ Similarly Amaladoss argues, "Religion is at the root of culture, animating it, while being structured by it."¹⁰² While Shorter, addressing the nature of religion insists that religion should be "defined in terms of 'ultimates:' faith in an ultimate reality, having an area of ultimate concern."¹⁰³ Defining religion in terms of 'ultimates,' or a society's understanding of ultimate reality, entails an inclusive definition of religion, one that denotes both theistic and atheistic religions or ideologies that endeavour to answer the ultimate questions about human existence.

This understanding of religion and of the relationship between religion and culture infers both that culture is inherently religious and that religion is inherently cultural. That is, all cultures contain within them beliefs and associated behaviours that may

⁹⁹ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural Systems" in M. Banton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1966), 4.

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion of religion and the role that religion plays in a culture see: Felix M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1958).

¹⁰¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 149.

¹⁰² Michael Amaladoss, "Culture and Dialogue," *International Review of Mission* 294 (1985), 171.

¹⁰³ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 37.

be identified as religious, and all religions find expression in cultural form. Thus although religions are concerned with the ultimate they articulate their understanding of the ultimate in ways that are appropriate to a particular culture. Discussing the religious nature of culture Shorter argues: "It does not seem, therefore, that the level of culture that is concerned with ultimate values can be removed from the religious sphere. Even when religion and faith in God are cast aside, we are dealing at this level with a religious category."¹⁰⁴ While Ukpong, expounding on the cultural nature of religion, contends: "Religion, though having a finality that is both transcendent and eschatological, finds expression only in and through culture."¹⁰⁵

In an endeavour to be sensitive to the insights of the social sciences, while at the same time safeguarding the sanctity of the Christian religion and averting the slide into absolute relativism, theologians have sought to explicate the relationship between the Christian religion and divine revelation. They affirm both the culturally conditioned form that Christianity takes in any one culture and the transcendent nature of Christianity, insisting that, despite the intimate relationship between Gospel and culture, in some way the Christian religion originates in, and embodies, divine revelation. Shorter contends, "The paradox is that, while religion needs a cultural formulation it cannot be reduced to the mere forms of culture. It must, by definition, transcend the purely cultural."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Bosch argues that, "It is an illusion to believe that we can penetrate to a pure gospel unaffected by any cultural or other human accretions." Yet while accepting the proliferation of a plurality of theologies insists: "It is true that we see only in part, but we do see."¹⁰⁷ Insisting on both the transcendent nature of the Christian religion and the culturally conditioned form that religion takes in any one culture has given rise to a number of different ways of understanding the relationship between the Christian religion, or Gospel, and culture. The following section, "Contextualisation, Acculturation, Inculturation and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁵ Justin Ukpong, "What is Contextualisation?," *Neue Zeitschrift für Mission-swissenschaft* 43 (1987), 168.

¹⁰⁶ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 182-186.

Interculturation,” will briefly chart the evolution of the church’s understanding of Gospel and culture and expound various contemporary theories of Gospel and culture.

1. Terminology

In this thesis the term ‘Thai culture’ will be used to refer to the totality of beliefs, values and knowledge that constitute the basis of social action in Thai society. The term ‘Thai Buddhist culture’ emphasises the Buddhist character of Thai culture, Thai Buddhism having significantly influenced Thai culture since Buddhism was adopted as the official religion of Thailand in the thirteenth century.¹ Because Christian missionaries and Thai Christians have endeavoured to distinguish between religious and cultural aspects of Thai culture this thesis will also employ the term ‘Thai Buddhist religious culture’ to refer to what may be considered as the specifically religious characteristics of Thai Buddhist culture. The term ‘Thai culture’ is used by Christian missionaries and Thai Christians, and occasionally in the thesis, to refer to aspects of Thai culture that have not been significantly influenced by, or may be distinguished from, Thai Buddhism.

B. Contextualisation, Acculturation, Inculturation and Interculturation

It is inevitable that an acceptance of both the culturally conditioned nature of Christianity and the transcendent nature of Christianity will produce a certain degree of tension. While most accept both the social scientists’ insights about culture and religion, and the theologians’ insistence regarding the transcendent nature of Christianity, they proffer different understandings of the relationship between the divine revelation and culture, or Gospel and culture. Lipner argues that historically Christians have adopted one of two major tendencies either the dialectic or the dialogical.¹⁰⁸ He maintains that those adopting the dialectic approach to Gospel and culture contend that “the gospel is other than and inimical to culture.” The Gospel is seen as ‘from above’ and culture ‘from below.’ The Gospel is deemed to be ‘of God’ and culture ‘of men and women.’ The Gospel is ‘light’ while culture is ‘darkness.’

¹⁰⁸ Julius Lipner, “ ‘Being One, Let Me Be Many’ Facets of the Relationship Between the Gospel and Culture,” *International Review of Mission* 294 (1985), 158-168.

By contrast those adopting the dialogical approach proffer a complementary understanding of culture and of the relationship between the Gospel and culture. Lipner distinguishes between the weak and the strong versions of the dialogical approach. The weak approach identifying particular cultures as the appropriate medium for the propagation of the Gospel, while dismissing other cultures, the strong approach more properly dialogical.

Different understandings of the relationship between Gospel and culture have given rise to disparate beliefs about how the Christian religion should interact with culture. Arguably the Apostle Paul adopted a dialogical approach to culture, utilising Athenian theology to communicate the Gospel to his audience (Acts 17:28-29). The Jewish church accepted similar theological premises when dealing with Gentile converts, maintaining that Gentiles did not have to become culturally Jewish before converting to Christ (Acts 15). This dialogical approach to culture was not, however, sustained throughout the history of the church. After Constantine's conversion, and the close affiliation of church and state, the church adopted the imperial Roman view of culture. Accordingly the Christian West was deemed civilised and defined in apposition to the uncivilised barbarian who dwelt outside Christendom. The term culture referred to the single, universal, normative culture of Christendom and the church assumed that the proclamation of the Gospel entailed the spread of European culture. Thus Arbuckle contends, the church "has demanded of cultures that they conform, not just to the heart of Christ's message, but to the dominant, Western, cultural way of expressing the Good News."¹⁰⁹

It was not until much later than an alternative, more dialogical approach, towards culture began to re-emerge hastened in part by rapid cultural change in the West and increasing exposure to the non-Western world. Gradually adjustments were made. Non-Western Christians were permitted to retain aspects of their local culture and to give Christianity an indigenous flavour. Catholics described this process as 'adaptation' or 'accommodation,' while Protestants preferred the term

¹⁰⁹ Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel: Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers*, 10.

‘indigenisation.’ Although the terms and practices these terms inferred represented a significantly more dialogical approach to culture than that which had proceeded, the church, and associated missionary organisations, still retained a largely normative understanding of culture. Bosch with the advantage of hindsight critiqued the ideology that lay behind the terms ‘adaptation’ ‘accommodation’ and ‘indigenisation.’ He identified a number of traits that characterised this process:¹¹⁰ he argued that the process of allowing non-Western Christianity to adopt local cultural characteristics was considered an optional extra and only embraced the peripheral aspects of a culture that were considered to be neutral and uncontaminated by other religions.¹¹¹ He pointed out that this process was seen as a concession to the non-Western Christians and ensured the ongoing dependence of the ‘younger’ churches on the ‘older’ churches in all essential matters of faith, order and practice.¹¹² He contended that it was never allowed to modify Western theology and had no respect for local cultures as indivisible wholes.¹¹³

During the 1970’s it became increasingly apparent that the terms and ethos those terms inferred were fundamentally flawed. Those within the Ecumenical, Evangelical and Roman Catholic wings of the church began to explore alternative approaches to Gospel and culture and to advance terms more appropriate to their emerging understanding of Gospel and culture. The term ‘contextualisation’ was coined in 1972 in a report issued by the Theological Education Fund for the WCC.¹¹⁴ The

¹¹⁰ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 449.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Theological Education Fund World Council of Churches, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-1977)* (Bromley, England: Theological Education Fund, 1972). See: William P. Russell, *Contextualization: Origins, Meaning and Implications. A Study of what the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches Originally Understood by the Term ‘Contextualization,’ with Special Reference to the Period 1970-1972*. Dissertatio Ad Lauream In Facultate S. Theologiae Apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae In Urbe (Rome: Remigio Ragonesi, 1995).

report insisted that, "Contextualisation of the Gospel is a missiological necessity."¹¹⁵ It began to develop a more complex definition of the interaction between cultures and of the relationship between Gospel and culture. The debate concerning Gospel and culture has continued unabated throughout the later half of the nineteenth century witnessing the emergence of a numerous terms, definitions of terms and models of understanding Gospel and culture. In his article "What is Contextualisation?" Ukpong distinguished between two types of contextualisation: the indigenisation type, which includes translation and inculturation models, and socio-economic type, which includes evolutionary and revolutionary models.¹¹⁶ The new terms and new ethos they represented have been received positively by representatives of the Ecumenical, Evangelical and Roman Catholic church. Whiteman states that contextualisation and inculturation "are deeper, more dynamic, and more accurate terms to describe what we are about in mission today."¹¹⁷ Bevans insisted: "The term contextualisation includes all that is implied in the older indigenisation or inculturation, but seeks to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice."¹¹⁸ While Byang H. Kato, General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar maintained that the term contextualisation is "a new term imported into theology to express a deeper concept than indigenisation ever does."¹¹⁹

This thesis employs the terms contextualisation, acculturation, inculturation and interculturalisation in an analysis of the western missionaries' and indigenous Christians' engagement with Thai Buddhist culture. Shorter distinguishes between acculturation, inculturation and interculturalisation. He uses the term acculturation to describe the initial encounter between cultures. In the context of Christian mission it

¹¹⁵ Theological Education Fund World Council of Churches, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-1977)*, 30.

¹¹⁶ Ukpong, "What is Contextualisation?" 168.

¹¹⁷ Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (1997), 2.

¹¹⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, 21.

¹¹⁹ Byang H. Kato "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1217.

refers to the missionaries' communication of the Gospel to an indigenous population.

He maintains that:

In a situation of acculturation missionaries begin to accommodate or adapt the Christian message, seeking local cultural expressions in order to make the message understood. They use elements from the local culture simply in order to communicate meaning and to enable their hearers to grasp their meanings according to their cultural categories.¹²⁰

The term inculturation refers to the ongoing dialogue between Gospel and culture. It is concerned with "the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture."¹²¹ It has been defined as:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation.'¹²²

The term interculturalisation is used to emphasise that mission, or evangelisation, is not a one-way process in which the Christian faith is transferred from one culture to another; rather, it involves a complex interaction between faith and culture, in the process of which both faith and culture are transformed.¹²³

While this thesis intends to employ Shorter's conceptualisation of acculturation, inculturation, and interculturalisation as a means of analysing attitudes to Thai Buddhist culture among western missionaries and Thai Christians, it will also refer to the work of another Catholic missiologist, Stephen Bevans, in examining the practical approaches of contextualisation. Bevans describes five models of contextualisation.¹²⁴ "Each model presents a different way of theologising which

¹²⁰ Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 14.

¹²¹ Ibid., 11.

¹²² Fr. Pedro Arrup SJ in Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11.

¹²³ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology; Faith and Cultures*. Similar models have been advanced by other theologians see, for example, Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

takes a particular context seriously, and so each represents a distinct theological starting point and distinct theological presuppositions.”¹²⁵

Bevans termed the first model the ‘translation model.’ This model is characterised by its belief that divine revelation is propositional and prioritises what it identifies as the supra-cultural Gospel, or revelation, that is unchanging from culture to culture.

Proponents of this model contend that the supra-cultural Gospel may be differentiated from ‘culture’, and that the Gospel may be inculturated in a host culture without being influenced by that culture. Culture is deemed to play a minor role in the process of inculturation. Bevans explains:

By the translation model, we do not mean a mere word-for-word correspondence of, say, the doctrinal language of one culture into the doctrinal language of another. Rather, we are concerned with translating the meaning of doctrines into another cultural context – and that translation might make those doctrines look and sound quite different from their original formulations. Nevertheless, the translation model insists that there is “something” that must be “put into” other terms. There is always something from the outside that must be made to fit inside; there is always something “given” that must be “received.”¹²⁶

Bevans’ second model differs from the first in that it gives much greater significance to culture. He describes it as the anthropological model of inculturation, which accepts that divine revelation and culture are inherently related. God reveals Godself in every culture and thus the revelation of God impregnates every culture. However, this model prioritises culture rather than divine revelation in the inculturation process. The principal concern is with “authentic cultural identity” not scripture or the Christian tradition.¹²⁷ Bevans contends:

This does not mean that the gospel cannot challenge a culture, but such a challenge is always viewed with suspicion that the challenge is not coming from God but from a tendency of one (western, Mediterranean) culture to impose its values on another.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 32-33.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 48.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 47.

Bevans' third model, the praxis model, includes the insights of practical theology that flow from an identification of divine revelation with the active presence of God in history. "God manifests God's presence not only, or perhaps not even primarily, in the fabric of culture, but also and perhaps principally in the fabric of history."¹²⁹ Consequently it prioritises theological action over theological reflection. Bevans maintains that the central insight of the praxis model is "that theology is done not simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action."¹³⁰

Bevans refers to his fourth model as the synthetic model which, like the anthropological model, maintains that divine revelation and culture are essentially intertwined and that God is revealed in and through particular cultures. However, the synthetic model expounds a different understanding of culture that results in a different understanding of the inculturation process. It maintains that every culture has "elements that are unique to it and elements that are held in common with other cultures or contexts," and that intercultural dialogue is therefore mutually beneficial.¹³¹ This interpretation of culture and of the relationship between different cultures encourages proponents of the synthetic model to adopt a more open respectful approach toward other cultures and other cultural embodiments of divine revelation than those who subscribe to the anthropological model. They insist that the process of inculturation involves the interaction between two cultural expressions of the revelation of God both of which may contribute to an understanding of God.

Bevans states:

In terms of theology, it will be recognised that it is not enough to extol one's own culture as the only place where God can speak to a particular cultural subject. One can also hear God speaking in other cultures... Attention to one's own culture can perhaps discover values in other cultures that those cultures have never noticed before, and attention to others...can transform and enrich one's own culture and worldview.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹³¹ Ibid., 83.

Bevans' last model is the transcendental model which recognises the importance of religious experience: divine revelation may only be 'known' as it is experienced. It is primarily interested in the process of inculturation that occurs as an individual experiences God. In the transcendental model "theology happens as a person struggles more adequately and authentically to articulate and appropriate this ongoing relationship with the divine."¹³²

The research will explore the ways in which the western missionaries' and indigenous Thai Christians' approaches to inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context are similar/dissimilar to Bevans' five models of contextualisation. It will argue that the American Presbyterian and OMF missionaries have adopted different models of contextualisation. The ways in which American Presbyterians have contextualised Christianity in Thailand reflecting Bevans' fourth model of contextualisation, the synthetic model. The ways in which OMF missionaries have contextualised Christianity in Thailand reflecting Bevans' first model of contextualisation, the translation model. The thesis will contend that despite being exposed to different theological traditions and different approaches to contextualisation Thai Christians inevitably, almost unconsciously, relate Christianity to Thai Buddhist culture in ways that reflect Bevans' synthetic model of contextualisation. The current research permits the author to suggest ways in which the synthetic model may be elaborated, revealing that an individuals proximity to a culture and attitude toward a culture significantly influence the inculturation process.

5. Research Methodology

Given that contextuality is of the essence of non-Western Christianity, the study of its history and contemporary manifestations requires a methodology that engages seriously with the context in which innovative theological reflection occurs.

Qualitative research is ideally suited to such contextual studies. It utilises methods of data generation that are flexible and sensitive to the context within which data are produced, while facilitating the generation of complex data that reflect the real life

¹³² Ibid., 99.

context. The research methods that are used in this thesis therefore combine historical study of archival sources and oral history with qualitative data generated in individual interviews and focus groups.

A. Historiography

During the later half of the nineteenth century the absolutisms of the eighteenth century were progressively undermined, particularly the epistemological assumptions that under girded the heroic model of science. History has not escaped unscathed. History's confidence in the scientific model of objectivity has gone. The belief that the historian could produce an impartial replica of the past has been rejected. Histories are no longer presented as authoritative accounts of the past, but co-exist alongside other, sometimes conflicting, historical narratives, in an intellectual climate that precludes any single interpretation being regarded as authoritative. In response Appleby, Hunt and Jacob have argued for a new epistemology that will enable history to avoid the cynicism and nihilism that accompany contemporary relativism. They have "redefined historical objectivity as an interactive relationship between an inquiring subject and an external object."¹³³ They insist that different perspectives on an external object elicit different interpretations of that object. However, these different interpretations are complementary rather than exclusive, and historians with equal access to the evidence should be encouraged to test one another's interpretations and debate conflicting interpretations. They conclude that "[T]ruths about the past are possible even if they are not absolute, and hence are worth struggling for."¹³⁴ Conscious of this post-modern understanding of historiography, the present author does not present her account of Christianity in Thailand as an objectively authoritative statement that replicates the object under discussion, but one of a number of possible interpretations, that is influenced by the author's own perspective, and that seeks to engage critically with other interpretations.

¹³³ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 259.

¹³⁴ Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, 7.

The study of mission/church history must also consider the critique of post-colonialism. Post-colonialism contends that relationships of power, particularly between the West and the East, have been reinforced by historical accounts. Said contends that history has been “a prominent, if not *the* prominent, instrument for the control of subject peoples.”¹³⁵ In order to challenge the hegemony of the West’s interpretation of the East that reinforces the domineering relationships played out between West and East, mission/church history must consciously draw attention to the role of indigenous Christians in mission/church history.

1. Historical Sources

This research has made extensive use of the archives at Payap University Archives, OMF Thailand National Office, and OMF International Headquarters in Singapore.¹³⁶ The Payap University Archives, the repository for the archives of CCT, holds a large collection of archives of APM and a small collection of archives of OMF. It is the only archival repository that specialises in Protestant history in Thailand. OMF Thailand has not yet deposited its historical documents in an archive but holds them at their national office in Bangkok and international headquarters in Singapore. The researcher was given unrestricted access to these documents.

B. Interviews

Interviews were selected as the principal method of data generation for qualitative data analysis. Interviews enable a researcher to access complex data by creating a context within which the interviewees can explore and express their own attitudes towards, and understanding of, complex issues. The interviewer acts as catalyst in this process, enabling the interviewees to feel their way towards a deeper level of self-understanding and self-expression.

¹³⁵ Edward Said in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), 355.

¹³⁶ The archives in the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, were not consulted because of the rigid fifty year restriction policy.

1. Individual Interviews with Missionaries

Individual interviews were conducted with missionaries currently working in Thailand and missionaries who had retired to the UK or America. Forty-four interviewees were selected, fourteen from the APM and twenty-eight from OMF.¹³⁷ The researcher selected individuals who were able to reflect on the past. The research sample included men and women, across a wide range of ages, some holding leadership positions in the church, others being lay members. The interviews were divided into two parts. The first part set out to gather the interviewees' oral history. It was unstructured in order to allow the interviewee freedom for personal reflection. The interviewer did, however, encourage the interviewees "to go beyond the personal and idiosyncratic by making connections, discussing issues and providing wider perspectives."¹³⁸ The second part of the interview set out to elicit the interviewees' opinions on particular issues. It was semi-structured, permitting the interviewer to be flexible about how and when questions were asked.¹³⁹ The questions explored the interviewees' attitudes towards Thai Buddhism, particularly the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, and assessed ways in which the missionaries communicated the Gospel to Thai Buddhists. All the interviews were conducted by the author, taped and transcribed.

2. Individual Interviews with Thai Christians

Individual interviews were conducted with Thai Christians. Fifty-eight interviewees were selected, thirty from ACTC and twenty-eight from CCT.¹⁴⁰ The researcher selected theologically literate people from both churches who were able to engage with the interviewer at some depth on a number of issues, in particular people who would be able to take a critical view of their relationship with their three heritages:

¹³⁷ When the research was conducted there were only twelve American Presbyterians working in Thailand compared with forty-nine OMF missionaries working in Central Thailand. An additional thirty OMF missionaries were engaged in language study in Central Thailand.

¹³⁸ David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London: Longman, 1982), 110.

¹³⁹ A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix 2.

¹⁴⁰ Two of the interviews with CCT Christians were not included in the analysis in Chapter Seven due to the poor quality of the tape. There are, however, occasional references to these interviews, one with Rev. Damrong Up-Ngan and the other with Dr. John Mark Thomthai.

Thai Christianity, Thai Buddhism and post-war mission theology. The primary criterion for selection of the interviewees was that they had received some kind of theological education. Accordingly most interviewees were in positions of leadership within the church. The research sample included men and women, first and second/third-generation Christians, and a spectrum of different ages.

The interviews were semi-structured allowing the interviewer to ask questions as issues arose, in a way that was appropriate to the context, without being restricted to a predetermined order or wording. The interview schedule consisted of key questions that would elicit the interviewees' own opinions on a number of issues.¹⁴¹ The interviews began with an open question about how the interviewees reached their current point of faith. Issues that previous researchers have identified as being of significance to Thai Christianity were raised spontaneously by the interviewees, including the interviewees' understanding of critical Christian beliefs, such as God, obedience, spirits, sin and salvation.¹⁴² As well as exploring these themes the interviewer aimed to discern more precisely how the interviewees interpreted their Christian faith in the Thai religious culture. In order to do this the interviewer asked progressively more specific questions about how the interviewee understood the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism.

A trained bilingual research assistant conducted fifty-four of the interviews in Thai. The research assistant was a retired member of OMF. He was chosen, over someone with no connection with the mission, because of the particular character of Thai culture in which Thai people are unlikely to talk to people they do not know or who are not respected members of a community. In addition to his own high reputation

¹⁴¹ A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix 2.

¹⁴² These theological issues were initially explored by Hughes in his doctoral research in 1983 and taken up again by Fordham in his doctrinal research in 1991. Philip J. Hughes, "Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand" (Ph.D., South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, Chiangmai, 1983) and Graham S Fordham, "Protestant Christianity and the Transformation of Northern Thai Culture: Ritual Practice, Belief and Kinship" (Ph.D., Department of Anthropology, University of Adelaide, 1991).

among members of ACTC, he was personally commended to members of CCT by Dr. Swanson, whose own credentials as a researcher are well respected among CCT members. Thus, the research assistant had recognised access to both CCT and ACTC Christians. All the interviews were taped and transcribed. Bilingual research assistants then translated the interview transcripts. While working primarily with the English transcripts, the researcher has sufficient knowledge of the Thai language to be able to make scholarly deductions from critical terms and expressions in the Thai scripts, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of what the interviewee was saying. Four of the interviews were conducted in English by the researcher.

C. Focus Groups

Focus groups served as an additional method of data generation for qualitative data analysis. They have been defined as “a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment.”¹⁴³ Morgan contends that the hallmark of focus groups “is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group.”¹⁴⁴ The researcher acts as group moderator in a structured discussion that ensures that the desired topics are covered.¹⁴⁵

Focus groups were used as a method of oral research only with OMF missionaries. Because of their significant number in Central Thailand, they represent an important body of people among whom the researcher could elicit varieties of opinion and assess the degree to which individual OMF missionaries interviewed were representative of the wider community. At the time the research was conducted the few American Presbyterians still working in Thailand had been fully integrated into CCT and no longer represented a comparable group to OMF. For that reason focus groups were not conducted with the American Presbyterians. Considerations of

¹⁴³ Richard A. Kreuger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 20.

¹⁴⁴ David Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research, Sage University Paper Series on Qualitative Research Methods, Series 16* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 12.

¹⁴⁵ A copy of the focus group schedule is included in Appendix 2.

cultural sensitivity weighed against attempting to use focus groups among Thai Christians in either CCT or ACTC. This was because focus groups were deemed to be a culturally inappropriate means of eliciting the opinion of Thai Christians on complex and potentially controversial issues.

1. Focus Groups with OMF Missionaries

Six focus groups were held involving thirty-four OMF missionaries in Central Thailand. The focus group participants were divided into groups of missionaries who had been in Thailand for similar periods of time: two groups who had worked in Thailand for less than one year, two groups between one and five years, and two groups for more than five years. The participants were guaranteed anonymity in order to encourage frank discussion within the group. All the focus groups were conducted by the author, taped and transcribed.

D. Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis of the data generated from the individual interviews and focus groups was shaped by the research questions.¹⁴⁶ Analysis was undertaken as soon as data was collected. Categories were generated which facilitated the dissection of the data. This was done in three ways. Firstly, categories were generated to reflect theological issues that had been identified in prior research on Thai Christianity: for example, the distinct ways in which Thai Christians understand the spirits of Thai Buddhism. Secondly, categories were generated to reflect the research questions with which the researcher began, though these were refined by the interviewees' responses in the course of the interviews themselves. Thirdly, the researcher looked for additional issues that were raised repeatedly by one or more interviewee and categories were assigned to these issues in order to facilitate a more detailed analysis. Initial explanations were produced and then used to guide the search for additional evidence as well as to test for alternative explanations. The computer software package, NVivo, was used to assist analysis.

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter One: 2., "Research Questions."

The potential for bias during these processes was taken into account. Lincoln and Guba suggest four criteria in response to the problem of bias: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.¹⁴⁷ A credible study is one that accurately identifies and describes the subject of enquiry. In this study credibility was enhanced through the researcher's comprehensive treatment of the data. Every interview was coded according to the categories identified, and the data was allowed to modify the categories and to shape the theoretical explanations that were developed during the analysis. Transferability is concerned with the degree to which the research findings are applicable to another setting or group of people. The theoretical samples in this study were not statistically representational of the mission or churches but did allow the researcher to say something meaningful about the mission/church communities because the samples included a number of significant persons from those communities. However, it was not assumed the research findings on APM or OMF could be generalised to the wider population of Protestant missionaries in Thailand, far less to the worldwide community of American Presbyterian and OMF missionaries. Confirmability refers to the concern to limit the researcher's own bias so that the research findings are determined by the respondents and not the researcher's own interests. In this study confirmability was sought by examining the data for the issues raised by the interviewees, which were not necessarily recognised as being of significance by the researcher. Dependability refers to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the treatment of the data. Dependability was sought through making certain that all the processes followed were clear, systematic, and well documented.

E. Research Ethics

The research project was explained to each interviewee before the interview commenced. The interviewees were asked if they would be willing for the interview to be taped, used in the thesis and future publications, and the tape(s) deposited in a designated archive. They were also asked if they would be willing for their names to be used in publication. All who were willing signed a consent form. The Thai Christians consented freely and willingly to these requests. A few Western

¹⁴⁷ Y. S. Lincoln and E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (London: Sage, 1985), 294-301.

missionaries indicated that they were unwilling for the tapes to be deposited in an archive, but were willing for the author to use the material in the thesis and future publications.

F. The Researcher

Contemporary epistemology contends that one's personal perspective critically influences one's approach towards and understanding of any given area of study. Hence it is important that any researcher acknowledge, to themselves and their reader, their own personal perspective and allow the reader freedom to assess how far that perspective influences their interpretation of the data under analysis.

I, the researcher and author of this thesis, consider Thailand to be my 'home from home,' having been born and raised in Thailand. I also have an intimate relationship with one of the missions and associated churches, my parents, Charles and Rachel Hillier, having worked with OMF in Central Thailand from 1960-1998. Therefore, I approach the study of OMF/ACTC as an insider. However, not being a member of OMF I have had the freedom to reflect on and to critique the mission in a way that a member of OMF might not. I am also a Christian with a vital interest in the life of the church worldwide and, having had the opportunity to engage in extensive theological study, have developed my own theological perspective which facilitates my ability to dialogue with the different theological agendas expounded by the two missions and associated churches.

6. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part One provides the historical and theological background to the study. Chapter One gives a brief introduction to Thai Buddhism, summarising the history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, its particular characteristics in Thai culture, and recent innovations that have taken place. Chapter Two offers an introduction to APM, and to CIM in relation to its development as OMF. It reviews the history of APM in Thailand prior to the Second World War and introduces the work of CIM in China. The chapter explores the missions' relationship to the worldwide ecumenical and evangelical movements, and summarises the

different approaches taken by those movements toward mission-church relations, other faiths, and other cultures.

Part Two analyses the work of APM and OMF in Thailand after the Second World War. Chapters Three and Five address the work of APM, Chapters Four and Six the work of OMF. The first two chapters of Part Two, Chapter Three on the work of APM and Chapter Four on the work of OMF, are each divided into two parts. The first part offers a concise history of the mission, while the second consists of a more detailed examination of the mission's approach to evangelism and mission-church relations. These chapters begin to explore the attitude of the missionaries toward Thai Buddhist culture. Chapters Five and Six comprise a fuller analysis of the missions' approach to Thai Buddhist culture, in particular Thai Buddhist religious culture and Thai Buddhism. Chapter Five explores the understandings and attitudes of American Presbyterian missionaries, while Chapter Six examines that of OMF missionaries. The Conclusion to Part Two consists of a detailed comparison of APM and OMF, and an analysis of APM's and OMF's acculturation of Christianity in relation to Bevans' five models of contextualisation.

Part Three analyses the self-statement of a select group of Thai Christians from CCT and ACTC. It explores how these Christians interpret their Christian faith in the Thai context, in particular in relation to Thai Buddhist religious culture. Chapter Seven explores the understandings and attitudes of CCT Christians, Chapter Eight that of ACTC Christians. These chapters examine Thai Christian attitudes towards involvement in Thai Buddhist culture, assess their understanding of how Buddhism may contribute to Thai Christianity, and analyse the interviewees' articulation of their Christian beliefs. The Conclusion to Part Three consists of a detailed comparison of CCT and ACTC interviewees' assessment of Thai Buddhist culture, and an analysis of their relationship to their three religious heritages: Thai Christianity; Thai Buddhism; and post-war mission theology, with reference, once again, to Bevans' five models of contextualisation.

Chapter Nine draws out the principal findings of the research, reflects them and offers summations and conclusions. It reviews the changing face of Thai Buddhist society, which sets the scene for the study of Thai Protestant Christianity. It discusses the key points that arose from a study of APM and OMF, detailing the missions' different approaches to evangelism, mission-church relations and Thai Buddhist culture. It summarises key aspects of Thai Christianity, arguing that despite different religious histories Thai Christians in the CCT and ACTC have adopted similar approaches to Thai culture and Thai religion. It examines the influence of foreign missionaries on Thai Christianity, demonstrating that missionary attitudes toward Thai culture and religion significantly influence, but do not dictate, the way in which Thai Christians dialogue with Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. The chapter then offers a critical assessment of the research of Hughes and Fordham and suggests ways in which the present research revises their conclusions and makes an original contribution to contemporary research on Thai Christianity.

7. Anticipated Contributions to Academic Scholarship

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the study of Thai Christianity. It elucidates the inculturation process that is occurring as Thai Christians endeavour to interpret and articulate their Christian faith in the Thai Buddhist context. It demonstrates that the process involves a complex dialogue between Thai Christians and their three religious heritages: Thai Christianity, Thai Buddhism and post-war mission theology. It highlights key aspects of Thai Christianity, analysing the ways in which Thai Christians articulate their Christian beliefs. It shows that Thai Christians from different theological traditions share a common approach toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism and that western missionaries influence but do not dictate the form that Christianity is taking in Thailand. The thesis reveals that Thai Christians are in the process of developing a contextual Christian theology, particular to their Thai Buddhist context, and are ready to dialogue with other contextual theologies around the world.

PART ONE:
HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL
BEGINNINGS

Part One: Historical and Theological Beginnings

Part One will provide the historical and theological background to the study. It will give a brief introduction to Thai Buddhism and to the two missions, APM and OMF, formerly CIM. It will explore the missions' relationship to the worldwide ecumenical movements, and summarise the different approaches taken by those movements toward mission-church relations, other faiths, and other cultures.

Chapter One: Thai Buddhism

1. Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction to Thai Buddhism. It will summarise the history of the Tai¹ in Southeast Asia, focusing particularly on the history of Theravada Buddhism amongst the Thai. It will consider the distinct character of Thai Buddhism, examining the non-Buddhist religious elements that have characterised Thai Buddhism since its earliest foundations. It will review the significant cultural and socio-political changes occurring in Thailand during the nineteenth and twentieth century, which have challenged traditional Thai Buddhist culture, and look at a number of Thai Buddhist reform movements that have come into being in an endeavour to reassert the centrality of Buddhism in Thai culture.

2. The History of Buddhism in Thailand

Tradition credits King Asoka (c.269-237 B.C.) with sending the first Buddhist missionaries to Southeast Asia.² However, the peoples of Southeast Asia were not converted to Theravada Buddhism until the thirteenth century.³ Before that the peninsula was inhabited by a number of Indianised civilisations that had incorporated aspects of Indian culture passed on by traders, Brahman priests and Buddhist monks.⁴ Hindu influences were more prominent among the Khmer and the Cham kingdoms, Buddhist influences among the Mon and Burmans.⁵

Between the 8th and 12th centuries the Tai gradually infiltrated the peninsula moving south from southern China. Coedes maintains that:

¹ According to common usage the term Tai will be used to refer to the Tai speaking peoples and the term Thai to refer to the inhabitants of Thailand only.

² Dhani Nivat, *A History of Buddhism in Siam* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1965), 1.

³ Charles F. Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula: Culture and Adaptation in Mainland Southeast Asia* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 76.

⁴ See George Coedes, *The Indianised States of Southeast Asia*, translated by Susan Brown Cowing and edited by Walter F. Vella (Honolulu: East-West Centre Press, 1968).

⁵ Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula*, 68.

[t]he Thai 'invasion' was...a gradual infiltration along the rivers and streams that had undoubtedly been going on for a very long time, part of the general drift of population from the north to the south that characterises the peopling of the Indochinese Peninsula.⁶

By the eleventh century the Tai were on the peripheries of the Indianised civilisations. By the end of the thirteenth century they had infiltrated those civilisations and gained a measure of political independence establishing Thai kingdoms around the capitals of Chiangmai, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya. Sukhothai was initially a vassal of the Khmer and adopted many aspects of Khmer society before securing its independence.⁷ In Ayuthaya the Thai lived alongside the Mon and adopted many aspects of Mon culture. In 1350 a Thai lord became ruler of both the Mons and the Tai and established a new kingdom at Ayuthaya.⁸

During the twelfth century the Singhalese king, Parakkama-Bahu I, initiated a reform of the Buddhist *Sangha* in Singhal that gave rise to the Singhalese form of Theravada Buddhism. This was vigorously promoted throughout Southeast Asia.⁹ The Thai were significantly influenced by the Singhalese missionary-monks and established their new principalities as Theravada Buddhist kingdoms. Keyes maintains that, "By the end of the early fifteenth century at the very latest, the vast majority of the people living in what is today Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos had become adherents of Theravada Buddhism."¹⁰ One inscription from Sukhothai records:

The people of this city of Sukhodai like to observe the precepts and bestow alms. King Rama Gamhen, the ruler of this city of Sukhodai, as well as the princes and princesses, the young men and women of rank, and all the noble folk without exception, both male and female, all have faith in the religion of the Buddha, and all observe the precepts during the rainy season.¹¹

⁶ Coedes, *Indianised States*, 189.

⁷ See A. B. Griswold, *Towards a History of Sukhodaya Art* (Bangkok: Fine Arts Department, 1967).

⁸ Keyes, *The Golden Peninsula*, 76.

⁹ The term *Sangha* refers to the Buddhist clergy, which is composed of monks and nuns. For a detailed discussion of the Buddhist *Sangha* see: Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 217-243.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹¹ A. B. Griswold and Prasert na Nagara, "The Inscription of King Rama Gamhen of Sukhodaya (1292 A.D.)," *Journal of the Siam Society* 59, no. 2 (1971), 209.



However, the same inscription discloses that adherence to Theravada Buddhism did not prohibit traditional religious practices which peacefully coexisted with Theravada Buddhism. The inscription details the obeisance due to the spirit of the mountain:

The divine spirit of that mountain is more powerful than any other spirit of this kingdom. Whatever lord may rule this kingdom of Sukhodai, if he makes obeisance to him properly, with the right offerings, this kingdom will endure, this kingdom will thrive; but if obeisance is not made properly or the offerings are not right, the spirit of the hill will no longer protect it and the kingdom will be lost.¹²

Towards the end of the fourteenth century Ayuthaya absorbed the kingdom of Sukhothai and a distinctive Siamese culture began to develop. When the Burmese destroyed Ayuthaya in 1767 the Siamese established a new capital at Thonburi-Bangkok. General Chao Phraya Chakri was crowned King Rama I in 1782, founding the Chakri Dynasty.

During the nineteenth century the European powers began to exert increasing pressure on Siam. King Rama IV, Mongkut, (1851-1868) recognised the necessity of modernisation and initiated a number of radical measures that impacted all aspects of Siamese society. Mongkut was primarily concerned with religious reforms. He wanted to return to the pristine teaching of the Buddha, to purge Thai Buddhism of all non-Buddhist embellishments and interpret Theravada Buddhism in light of modern scientific thinking.¹³ He established a new Buddhist order, the *Thammayutินิกai*, as a means of disseminating his ideas. This order remained within the national Buddhist *Sangha* alongside the *Mahanikai* order. While Prince Wachirayan, one of Mongkut's sons, perpetuated Mongkut's religious reforms, Chulalongkorn who succeeded Mongkut as king (1868-1910) carried on the political reforms initiated by Mongkut. These contributed to the emergence of a strong united nation. However, the rapid modernisation program implemented by

¹² Ibid., 214.

¹³ See Craig J. Reynold, "The Buddhist Monkhood in Nineteenth Century Thailand" (Ph.D., Cornell University, 1973).

Chulalongkorn culminated in the 'revolution' of 1932, which witnessed Siam's transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy.¹⁴

Siam has always celebrated a close relationship between the king and Buddhism. There is a mutual dependence between the *Sangha* and the monarchy, the *Sangha* legitimating the power of the king, the king protecting the *Sangha*. Ishii demonstrates that *Sangha* Acts during the twentieth century have increased the government's control over the *Sangha*.¹⁵ Keyes insists that governments have increasingly used the *Sangha* to inculcate a sense of nationalism rooted in a common Buddhist heritage and to implement government policies.¹⁶

3. Characteristics of Thai Buddhism

The Buddha expounded the truth, or *dhamma*, revealed to him. He taught his followers that life is characterised by sorrow (*dukkha*), and impermanence (*anicca*) and explained that even one's self or ego is impermanent (*anatta*). He maintained that the one absolute in a world of *dukkha*, *anicca* and *anatta* is the Law of *Karma*, a moral law, representing moral absolutes, that rewards good and bad actions. He explained that such actions, however, bind one to the wheel of life, affecting one's perpetual rebirth (*samsara*). Buddha believed that salvation consisted of escape from the wheel of life and could be achieved by accepting the truth about the world, encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths, and practicing the Eight Fold Path. The Four Noble Truths acknowledge that the human condition is characterised by *dukkha*, that *dukkha* is caused by craving (*tanha*), that *tanha* can be overcome, and that *tanha* is overcome by following the Eight Fold Path. The Eight Fold Path is traditionally split into three sections: morality (right speech, right action, right livelihood); mental

¹⁴ J. Wright, *The Balancing Act: A History of Modern Thailand* (California: Pacific Rim Press, 1991), 33.

¹⁵ See Yoneo Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society: Thai Buddhism in History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986).

¹⁶ Roger Eugene Harmon, "Buddhism and Action: The *Thammathuut* ('Ambassador of Dharma') Program in Thailand" (Ph.D., University of Washington, 1978).

discipline (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration); and wisdom (right view, right thought).

Different schools of thought soon arose, the most well known of which are the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. Sanskrit was the language of Mahayana Buddhism, Pali that of Theravada. The two traditions developed different understandings of key Buddhist doctrines and spread across different geographical regions, Mahayana through northern India to China and into East Asia, Theravada through Ceylon to Southeast Asia. Initially the Theravada Buddhist tradition was passed on orally and was not written down until about the first century B.C. In the fifth century A.D. Buddhaghosa, from Sri Lanka, composed the *Visuddhimagga*, or 'Path of Purification.' This amounted to a thorough systemisation of the Theravada tradition and his interpretations became the classic expression of Theravada Buddhism.¹⁷

Keyes contends that in the twelfth century Theravada Buddhism, hitherto a religion of the educated elite, cultivated in schools or temples, became a religion of the masses.¹⁸ That is Theravada Buddhism penetrated the little as well as the great tradition.¹⁹ Keyes argues that in the process Buddhism underwent a radical transformation in which the traditional religious goal of salvation, epitomised in the attainment of *nibbana*, the final release from the cycle of reincarnation attained by the extinction of all desires and individual existence, was replaced by an alternative religious goal, the reduction of suffering in this life and the next.²⁰ *Nibbana* became a distant aspiration. The populous sought to ease their life of suffering by accumulating merit, through merit-making and avoiding demeritorious acts. The propensity to seek

¹⁷ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 142.

¹⁸ Keyes, *Golden Peninsula*, 86.

¹⁹ Redfield distinguishes between "the great tradition of the reflective few" and the "little tradition of the largely unreflective many". His conceptual analysis is useful although it still incorrectly prioritises the great tradition. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Civilisation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, London: Cambridge University Press, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), 70.

²⁰ Keyes, *Golden Peninsula*, 86.

a better life, rather than *nibbana*, through the accumulation of merit has accentuated the importance of merit-making rituals within Theravada Buddhism throughout Southeast Asia. Kirsch insists that, “Most Thai are linked to Buddhism through popular beliefs about ‘merit’ (*bun*) and the pervasive ritual system connected to these beliefs, ‘merit-making’ (*tham bun*).”²¹ Thai Buddhism recognises a host of different activities as merit-making. Khantipalo, a Thai Buddhist monk in the *Mahanikai* order, details ten ways of making merit: giving, moral conduct, mind-development, reverence, helpfulness, dedicating meritorious acts to others, rejoicing in the meritorious acts of others, listening to the *Dhamma*, teaching the *Dhamma*, and “straightening out one’s views.”²² Buddhist monks, keen to promote national development, have endeavoured to broaden the traditional understandings of merit-making to include non-religious activities such as participation in, and giving to, community development projects.²³

One’s relative accumulation of merit is deemed to be the principal cause of one’s life circumstances. Kirsch argues that, “Individuals frequently account for events and experiences in their lives in terms of their relative store of merit; all statuses, situations, and events can – potentially, at least – be interpreted and explained in terms of merit.”²⁴ However, merit does not necessarily provide a psychologically satisfying way of interpreting the world. Life is invariably unpredictable. One may not receive the benefits of merit made in this life until the next life and the effect of

²¹ Thomas A. Kirsch, “Complexity in the Thai Religious System: An Interpretation,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 2 (1977), 246.

²² Bhikkhu Khantipalo, *The Wheel of Birth and Death*, *The Wheel Publication No. 147/148/149* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970), 7, 20.

²³ Seri Phongphit, *Religion in a Changing Society: Buddhism, Reform and the Role of Monks in Community Development in Thailand* (Hong Kong: Arena Press, 1988), 41, 93. A number of studies have sought to quantify the amount of merit made by each of these activities. For example see: S. J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-East Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 147-148 and Neil J. A. Mulder, *Monks, Merit and Motivation: An Exploratory Study of the Social Functions of Buddhism in Thailand in Processes of Guided Social Change, Special Report Series No. 1* (Illinois: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1969), 9.

²⁴ Kirsch, “Thai Religious System,” 246.

demerit accumulated in previous lives may be worked out in one's current life. Keyes suggests that this may explain why Thai Buddhists have supplemented Theravada Buddhism with a rich variety of other religious beliefs and practices.²⁵

Piker identifies three religious traditions within Thai Buddhism: Buddhism; traditional beliefs and practices concerning spirits, which he refers to by the term animism; and Brahmanism.²⁶ He insists that the "magico-animistic (*sic*) elements are among its [Thai Buddhism's] most important ingredients."²⁷ While recognising the complexity of these beliefs Piker distinguishes between four sources of power that the Thai propitiate or manipulate in order to avoid misfortune and secure blessing: spirits of minor deities, spirits of deceased humans, ghosts and sorcery, and amulets. Tambiah contends that spirits and ghosts, both referred to by the term *phii*, can manifest "characteristics ranging from benevolence, prestige and responsible power to malevolence, notoriety and caprice."²⁸ In order to ensure the favour of such morally ambivalent beings the Thai offer gifts and prayers to the *phii*. Some times a vow or promise is made to the spirit propitiated. Kirsch explains that, "[i]f propitiation is involved, the villager promises a gift *if* and *when* his request is granted."²⁹ Sorcery is also used to manipulate the spirits both for good and for evil.³⁰ Amulets, commonly in the form of Buddha images, are worn to ensure good fortune and avoid misfortune.³¹ Observing that Buddhist concepts, including the Buddha, his

²⁵ Keyes, *Golden Peninsula*, 87.

²⁶ The term animism is problematic. It was coined by E.B. Tylor, (1832-1917), who developed a theory about religion in order to explain the origin of religion. That theory, however, has been challenged by recent scholarship and the term animism abandoned. The term will not be used in this thesis unless referring specifically to works that employ it. Kees W. Bolle, "Animism and Animatism" in Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), 296-302.

²⁷ Steven Piker, "The Relationship of Belief Systems to Behaviour in Rural Thai Society," *Asian Survey* 5 (1968), 385.

²⁸ Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults*, 59.

²⁹ Piker, "Relationship of Belief Systems," 389.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

³¹ *Ibid.*

teaching and the order, are invoked in order to influence the spirits and that Buddhist monks participate in these ceremonies, Piker argues that the beliefs and practices related to spirits have been fully integrated into Thai Buddhism. Piker notes that, “[a] monk’s reputation may be enhanced through proficiency with essentially non-Buddhist techniques.”³²

Kirsch also identifies “beliefs and practices relating to ‘spirits,’” which he refers to by the term animism, and aspects of Brahmanism in Thai Buddhism. He distinguishes between court Brahmanism and what he calls folk Brahmanism.³³ He argues that while the influence of court Brahmanism is restricted to royal rituals, folk Brahmanism has been incorporated into the religious beliefs and practices of the Thai populous.³⁴ The most common Brahman concept is the *khwan*. The term *khwan* refers to an individual’s essence, or elements of the soul. They are believed to “have a tendency to wander, to become disorganised, or to disintegrate” and a religious ritual known as the soul-tying ritual is performed in order to secure the *khwan*’s well being.³⁵ Kirsch, like Piker, argues that traditional beliefs and practices concerning spirits and Brahmanism have been “logically integrated” into Thai Buddhism.³⁶

Thai Buddhism is not unique in Buddhism in having incorporated aspects of other religious traditions. Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Burma are also replete with non-Buddhist elements, including indigenous beliefs and practices related to spirits as well as Brahmanism inherited from India. Although the presence of non-Buddhist elements in Singhalese, Burmese and Thai Buddhism is widely accepted, different understandings of the relationship between the disparate religious traditions have been proposed. Le May insists that Theravada Buddhism is merely a veneer over the beliefs and practices related to spirits that dominate Thai and Burmese religion:

³² Ibid., 387.

³³ Kirsch, “Thai Religious System,” 252.

³⁴ Ibid., 252.

³⁵ Ibid., 253.

³⁶ Ibid.

It must not be forgotten that to the vast majority of Siamese (and Burmese) peasants Buddhism is, and always has been, what I call 'The Decoration of Life,' and the people themselves have remained at heart animists (*sic*).³⁷

Ames and Spiro both insist that Buddhism is the dominant religious tradition.³⁸

However, Ames argues that Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements form a single religious system, while Spiro contends that they do not. Terwiel's study of Thai Buddhism distinguished between the religion of the peasant and that of the elite. He contends that peasants are unable to distinguish between Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements whereas the educated elite are able to distinguish between the different religious traditions and consistently prioritise Buddhism.³⁹ In this thesis I will use the term Thai Buddhism to refer to the complexity of beliefs and practices which make up religion in Thailand without distinguishing between the different religious traditions that have influenced Thai religion or privileging any one tradition.

4. Recent Innovations in Thai Buddhism

Komin maintains that Thai Buddhism has not kept pace with social change and as a result is not as highly valued as it used to be in traditional Thai culture.⁴⁰ The seeming inability of the national Buddhist organisation to meet the religious needs of Thai society has left a religious vacuum that is being filled with new religious movements including Buddhist reform movements, three of these have arisen to national prominence: the *Suan Mokkh*, *Dammakaya* and *Santi Asoke* movements.

The *Suan Mokkh* movement was established by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. Buddhadasa was ordained in 1932. Shortly after his ordination he left his Bangkok monastery and

³⁷ R. Le May, *The Culture of Southeast Asia, the Heritage of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), 163.

³⁸ M. Ames, "Buddha and the Dancing Goblins: A Theory of Magic and Religion," *American Anthropologist* 66 (1964), 75-82 and M. Spiro, *Burmese Supernaturalism* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

³⁹ B. J. Terwiel, *Monks and Magic: An Analysis of Religious Ceremonies in Central Thailand*, *Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series No. 24* (Bangkok: Craftsman Press Co., 1975).

⁴⁰ Suntaree Komin, *Social Dimensions of Industrialisation in Thailand* (Bangkok: NIDA Research Centre, 1989), 56.

withdrew to the forest not far from his home in the South (Chaiya) to practice the *dhamma*. His forest dwelling became known as the *Suan Mokkh* (literally Garden of Liberation) and other monks joined him. Buddhadasa was committed to returning to the original teaching of Buddha. He critiqued anyone or anything he felt misinterpreted the Buddha, including Buddhaghosa and the Thai Buddhist *Sangha*. Buddhadasa argued that Thai Buddhism's acceptance of Buddhaghosa's teaching and adaptation of non-Buddhist beliefs and practices had made it an obstacle to the practice of true Buddhism. Like Mongkut, Buddhadasa sought to demythologise Thai Buddhism. He coined the terms *phasaa khon* and *phasaa dham* (human language and *dhammic* language) to enable him to distinguish between the common meaning of a word/phrase and the *dhammic*, or true, meaning.⁴¹ He insisted that most Thai Buddhists fail to understand or misunderstand key Buddhist doctrines because Buddhism is interpreted in human language rather than in *dhammic* language. He was committed to disseminating a correct understanding of Buddhism based on a comprehension of the *dhammic* language.⁴²

Buddhadasa advocated a socially engaged Buddhism.⁴³ He believed that Buddhism was relevant to social, political and cultural issues. His critique of modern Thai society inspired and influenced many activists although he has not directly engaged in politics. He was accused of being a communist in 1948 and again in the 1970s and 1980s. No action was taken against him, however, due to his good relations with the authorities and because of his standing as a Pali scholar and sincere practitioner.

Buddhadasa broke new ground in his attitude toward other Buddhist traditions, including the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, and other faiths, particularly

⁴¹ Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Toward the Truth*, edited by Donald K. Swearer (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 56-86.

⁴² For a comprehensive analysis of Buddhadasa's thinking see: Peter A. Jackson, *A Buddhist Thinker for the Modern World* (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1988).

⁴³ For example see Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Dhammic Socialism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development, 1986).

Christianity.⁴⁴ He argued that all religions have two levels, a mundane and a transcendent and that although religions differ at the mundane level they are united at the transcendent level. The mundane and transcendent realms correspond to the two languages: common and *dhammic*. If the common language is used to compare religions the differences will be accentuated. If the *dhammic* language is used one will appreciate their common nature:

The ordinary, ignorant worldling is under the impression that there are many religions and that they are all different to the extent of being hostile and opposed. Thus one considers Christianity, Islam and Buddhism as incompatible and even bitter enemies. Such is the conception of the common person who speaks according to the impression held by common people... If, however, a person has penetrated to the fundamental nature (*dhamma*) of religion, he will regard all religions as essentially similar. Although he may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and so on, he will also say that essentially they are all the same. If he should go to a deeper understanding of *dhamma* until finally he realises the absolute truth, he would discover that there is no such thing called religion – that there is no Buddhism, Christianity or Islam.⁴⁵

Despite being highly controversial Buddhadasa has had an immense influence on Thai Buddhism. Sulak Sivaraksa contends that, “It is largely due to Buddhadasa that most of the younger generation in Siam now turn to Buddhist values and take Buddhism seriously.”⁴⁶

The *Dhammakaya* and *Santi Asoke* Movements were both established in the 1970s and gained large followings during the 1980s. While the *Dhammakaya* movement aims to reform Thai Buddhism from within the national monastic organisation, the *Santi Asoke* movement aims to revive Buddhist practices independently of state Buddhism. The *Dhammakaya* movement traces its history back to the end of the nineteenth century when a monk called Luang Poh Sod initiated a new form of Buddhist meditation. One of his followers, Khun Yay, became a famous meditation

⁴⁴ For example see Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 6* (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranasar, 1967).

⁴⁵ Donald K. Swearer ed., *Me and Mine: Selected Essays of Bhikkhu Bhuddhadasa* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 146.

⁴⁶ Sulak Sivaraksa in Donald K. Swearer, *Bhikkhu Buddhadasa the Reformer* (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 1981), 2.

teacher and in the 1960s taught a school boy called Chaiboon Sutipol. Chaiboon was ordained in 1969 and shortly after started a group, the *Dhammaprasit*. The group targeted young graduates, establishing Buddhist university clubs, meditation classes for graduates and mass ordinations for students. In 1970 they built the *Dhammakaya* meditation centre in Pathum Thani (north of Bangkok). In 1984 the grounds expanded from 80 to 800 acres and in 1985 they opened a mediation centre that could hold 100,000 people.⁴⁷ The movement attracted the support of the state and monarchy and remained within the national Buddhist organisation. However, its ambitious projects and the relatively high standard of living of the Buddhist monks has been heavily criticised by those who believe the movement reflects the ethos of big business and not religion. After hearing of the movement's plans to expand the temple complex Former Prime Minister M.R. Kukrit Pramoj commented: "This does not sound like the words of a monk, but the words of a financier who has several million *baht* and who is looking for a land to build a resort."⁴⁸ He concluded that the movement was in the business of selling "religious pleasure."

The *Santi Asoke* movement has also sought to reform Thai Buddhism but has chosen to do so independently of the national monastic organisation. The movement was established by Bodhiraksa, a Buddhist monk who set up his own Buddhist centre in Nakhon Pathom province in 1973. In contrast to the mainstream *Sangha*, which they criticised for lax behaviour, the group advocated a radically simple way of life that included: adopting a vegetarian diet, eating only one meal a day, refusing all addictive substances, abstaining from sleep during the day and abstaining from owning money or other unnecessary things. Satha-Anand maintains that the groups Ten Commandments are "a direct critique of Thai monks in general."⁴⁹ The group's

⁴⁷ Marja-Leena Heikkila-Horn, "Two Paths to Revivalism in Thai Buddhism: The Dhammakaya and Santi Asoke Movements," *Temenos* 32 (1996), 94.

⁴⁸ M.R. Kukrit Pramoj in Suwanna Satha-Anand, "Religious Movements in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhist Struggles for Modern Relevance," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 4 (1990), 402.

⁴⁹ Satha-Anand, "Religious Movements," 403. The Ten Commandments are: abstain from eating meat, abstain from eating more than once a day, abstain from taking all addictive substances, abstain from sleeping during the day (5am-6pm), abstain from wearing shoes, abstain from using bag and umbrella, abstain from owning money or other unnecessary things, abstain from making or sprinkling

critique of Thai Buddhist practices, in particular traditional beliefs and practices related to the spirits that have been incorporated into Thai Buddhism, bears a striking resemblance to that of Buddhadasa.⁵⁰ They also “share Buddhadasa’s social orientation and social criticism.”⁵¹ One *Santi Asoke* publication states that: “A religious institution should help the society in solving its problems, otherwise the existence of the religious institution becomes meaningless, which has happened to the mainstream Buddhist institutions in Thailand.”⁵² In 1975 Bodhiraksa withdrew from the national monastic organisation, re-ordaining his followers in a new monastic organisation. Bodhiraksa’s action provoked conflict with the state and national Buddhist organisation.⁵³ Heikkila-Horn, however, argues that it was not the unorthodoxy of the movement that prompted conflict but the close liaison between the movement and Major-General Chamlong Srimuang and his *Palang Dhamma* party.⁵⁴ Discussing the reaction of state and *Sangha* to both the *Santi Asoke* movement and the *Dhammakaya* movement Heikkila-Horn insists “that orthodox Buddhism and unorthodox Buddhism in Thailand are definitions which are outlined by the state authority rather than by independent or Buddhist scholarly authority.”⁵⁵ If the *Santi Asoke* movement is allowed to continue it will, “*de facto*, form a third Buddhist sect in Thailand” alongside the *Mahanikai* and *Thammayutnikai*.⁵⁶

holy water, abstain from making Buddha images and amulets, abstain from performing sacrificial rites involving the use of fire, smoke, or water (ibid.).

⁵⁰ Marja-Leena Heikkila-Horn, *Buddhism with Open Eyes: Belief and Practice of Santi Asoke* (Bangkok: Fah Apai Co., 1997), 142.

⁵¹ Ibid., 143.

⁵² The Santi Asoke Movement in Heikkila-Horn, “Two Paths,” 99.

⁵³ For a full review of the conflict see Heikkila-Horn, *Buddhism with Open Eyes*, 64-72.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 204. Major-General Chamlong Srimuang established the political party called Palang Dharma, meaning the Force of Dhamma, in 1992. He contested the general elections in March 1992 and was elected to Parliament. The pro-military parties, however, nominated General Suchinda Krapayoon for Prime Minister, which Chamlong vigorously opposed. Large public demonstrations ensued resulting in the bloodbath in May 1992. Elections followed, after which Chuan Leekpai was nominated Prime Minister.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 209.

5. Conclusion

The Buddha's teaching has influenced Southeast Asia since the second century before the Christian era when the Indianised civilisations first arose across the peninsula. The first Thai kingdoms, established in the thirteenth century, were distinct from the previous Indianised civilisations in that they were founded as Theravada Buddhist societies. However, it is evident that other non-Buddhist religious traditions have also had a considerable influence on Thai religion, in particular the traditional beliefs and practices related to spirits and Brahmanism. Rapid modernisation during the nineteenth and twentieth century prompted religious reform. The first renewal movement was initiated by Mongkut and succeeded in reforming Thai Buddhism from within the national Buddhist organisations. Subsequent reform movements have been more controversial and some have chosen to move outside the national Buddhist organisation representing a significant challenge to traditional Thai Buddhism.

Chapter Two: The American Presbyterian Mission in Siam and the China Inland Mission in China before the Second World War

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the background to the analytical history of APM and OMF and study of Thai Christianity that follows. It is necessary to introduce CIM's work in China as background to OMF's work in Thailand because CIM became OMF after leaving China and basic OMF principles and practices were established by CIM in China. The chapter will argue that while APM was well established in Thailand before the Second World War, CIM, being a single field mission, had no prior experience of the Thai or Thailand. It will show that while APM was a key member of the ecumenical movement, committed to working with other missions and other churches, CIM had withdrawn from the ecumenical movement and was unwilling to compromise its theological principles for the sake of institutional unity. It will contend that despite differing attitudes to the ecumenical movement both missions were committed to the ideal of an independent national church. The chapter will finish with a review of the ecumenical and evangelical movement in order to offer a theological background for a study of the work of APM and CIM/OMF.

2. The American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand: 1840-1946

A. The Siam Mission

In 1837 the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) formed the Board of Foreign Missions (BFM).¹ Hitherto the missionary interests of PCUSA had been represented by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions

¹ Stanley W. Rycroft, *The Ecumenical Witness of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States* (USA: The Board of Christian Education of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1968), 55.

(ABCFM).² The following year Rev. R.W. Orr, an American Presbyterian missionary in Singapore, recommended that the BFM open a mission in Siam. Rev. and Mrs. William P. Buell were the first BFM appointees to arrive in Siam arriving in August 1840. Ill-health, however, forced them to return to America in February 1844 and APM in Siam was temporarily suspended. On 22 March 1847 Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Stephen Mattoon and Dr. Samuel House arrived in Bangkok and re-opened APM in Siam. Rev. and Mrs. Jesse Caswell and Rev. and Mrs. Asa Hemenway, of the ABCFM, were the only other Protestant missionaries resident in Siam.³ Rev. Dr. Dan Beach Bradley, one of the most influential of the early Protestant missionaries who introduced the first Siamese printing press to Thailand and made significant medical advances including developing the first vaccination against small-pox in Thailand, had recently left for America and did not return until 16 May 1850.⁴ The new missionaries applied themselves to language study and distributing Christian literature. House re-opened Bradley's medical dispensary. Mrs. Mattoon began to teach boys and girls in her home opening the first APM school in 1852. On 31 August 1849 the missionaries organised a church and shortly after Ki-eng Qua-Sean, a Chinese Christian and convert of ABCFM missionaries, joined them. Ten years later on 3 August 1859 they baptised their first Siamese convert, Nai Chune.

² Robert E. Speer, *Presbyterian Foreign Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1902), 12-13.

³ See: Jesse Caswell, *Abstract Journal of Jesse Caswell*, edited by George Haws Feltus (Typescript: Troy, New York, 1931).

⁴ McFarland, *Historical Sketch*, 8, 17, 22; Dan Beach Bradley, *Abstract of the Journal of Rev. Dan Beach Bradley, M.D. Medical Missionary in Siam: 1835-1873*, edited by George Haws Feltus (Cleveland: Pilgrim Church, 1936); Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 84; Donald Charles Lord, "In His Steps: A Biography of Dan Beach Bradley, Medical Missionary to Thailand: 1835-1873," (Ph.D., Western Reserve University, 1964); *idem.*, *Mo Bradley and Thailand, A Christian World Mission Book* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1969); *idem* "The Gentle Revolutionary: Emelie Royce Bradley, 1811-1845," typescript: n.p., n.d.; and W. M. Orr, Jr., "Ledger and Diary of Emilie Royce Bradley," n.p., n.d.

In 1858 Rev. Daniel McGilvary,⁵ who later married Bradley's daughter Sophia, and Rev. and Mrs. Jonathan Wilson arrived, followed two years later by Rev. Samuel Gamble and Rev. and Mrs. S. George McFarland⁶ and Rev. and Mrs. Noah. A. McDonald. The arrival of new personnel enabled the mission to commence work outside Bangkok. In June 1861 the McGilvays and McFarlands moved to Petchaburi. A school was opened and in 1863 a church organised. The same year the first convert, a Siamese, was baptised. In 1867 three more Siamese had converted to Christianity and Kru Klai was appointed as the first Siamese preacher. The McFarlands remained in Petchaburi until 1878 when George McFarland was employed by the Siamese government to establish the first government school.⁷

Petchaburi remained the only Siam Mission station outside Bangkok for almost thirty years until the arrival of additional missionaries enabled the mission to move personnel into Rajaburi (1889), Pitsanuloke (1899), Nakhon Sritamraat (1900), and Trang (1910). In each location mission schools, hospitals and medical dispensaries were established in addition to the church.⁸

B. The Laos Mission

Daniel McGilvary became interested in North Siam or Laos⁹ after meeting Laos slaves in Petchaburi. In 1863 he and Jonathan Wilson visited Chiangmai, and determined to establish a new mission in the North. McGilvary wrote: "[w]e

⁵ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 449-450.

⁶ Ibid., 448.

⁷ For a critical analysis of APM in Petchaburi see: Herbert R. Swanson, *Towards a Clean Church: A Case Study in Nineteenth-Century Thai Church History* (Chiangmai: Office of History: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1991).

⁸ For a detailed account of the Siam Mission see: McFarland, *Historical Sketch*; Wells, *History of Protestant Work*; and Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History*.

⁹ 'North Siam' or 'Laos' refers to the northern provinces of Siam of which Chiangmai was the capital. The ruler was a feudal vassal of the king of Siam and expected to make triennial visits to the king in Bangkok. The culture and language of the Laos was similar though not identical to the Siamese. Although both were Theravada Buddhist Dodd identified significant differences in their religious practices persuading him to refer to Theravada Buddhism in the north as the Yuan cult (William Clifton Dodd, *The Tai Race* (Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1923)).

remained only ten days; but one day would have sufficed to convince us.”¹⁰

Although BFM sanctioned their plans for a new mission in 1865 personnel shortages delayed the work for a further two years. It was not until 3 January 1867, after receiving the permission of both the king of Siam, Mongkut, and prince of Chiangmai, Chao Kawilorot, that the McGilvays set out for Chiangmai. They arrived on 3 April 1867 and established the second APM in Siam, the Laos Mission. The Wilsons joined them the following year. During the first year four influential Siamese Buddhists converted to Christianity: Nan Inta, an abbot, who was persuaded to convert after McGilvary correctly predicted an eclipse;¹¹ Noi Sunya, a doctor; Sen Ya Wichai, an officer; and Nan Chai, an abbot. Swanson argued that “[I]n just a little over two years, the Chiangmai mission accomplished far more than the Siam mission in Bangkok achieved in twenty long years.”¹²

During the 1860s the prince of Chiangmai, Chao Kawilorot, became increasingly concerned that the old order, which recognised him as absolute sovereign in the Northern provinces, was being eroded and his authority undermined. Influenced by an anti-missionary Portuguese advisor, the prince held the mission, Christianity and western powers, especially the British, responsible. On 14 September 1869 Chao Kawilorot ordered the execution of two Thai Christians, Nan Chai and Noi Sunya. McGilvary and Wilson despatched a hurried note to their friends in Bangkok.¹³ The Siamese High Commissioner and two APM missionaries, Rev. Noah A. McDonald and Rev. S. C. George, duly arrived and on 28 November 1869 met with Chao Kawilorot. After reading the king’s decree, which permitted the missionaries to remain in Chiangmai, the prince remarked: “This letter does not amount to so much. It gives the missionaries privilege to remain if they wish, or go if they prefer.”¹⁴ The High Commissioner, McDonald and George urged the McGilvays and Wilsons to

¹⁰ Daniel McGilvary, *A Half-Century Among the Siamese and the Lao* (London: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912), 64.

¹¹ Ibid. 97.

¹² Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua*, 12.

¹³ McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 118.

¹⁴ McGilvary, *Half-Century*, 123.

leave. They, however, chose to remain in Chiangmai. Shortly after this incident Chao Kawilorot left for Bangkok and on the return journey to Chiangmai suffered a stroke and died.

Swanson argued that the martyrdom of Nan Chai and Noi Sunya and the subsequent actions of the American Presbyterian missionaries had a significant impact on the development of the church in North Thailand. He insisted that these events undermined the growth of the church, stopping any mass conversions and discouraging those of the higher classes from converting. He contended that at the same time the events strengthened the position of the mission through its association with the modernising, centralising powers in Bangkok. He maintained: "While the Christian 'movement' languished, the prestige and the status of the mission grew... the missionaries took their place in the highest levels of society and became, for all practical purposes, the real patrons of converts."¹⁵ The missionaries' exalted position was reinforced in 1878 when a further appeal to the king elicited the *Edict of Toleration*, which permitted Siamese citizens to embrace Christianity.¹⁶

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s the church spread slowly across North Siam, partly through the migration of Thai Christians and partly through the work of Thai and missionary itinerant evangelists and resident missionaries in Chiangmai and Lampang (1885). During the 1890s the church grew more rapidly and missionaries opened work in Lamphun (1891), Prae (1893), Nan (1894) and Chiangrai (1897). Everywhere missionaries resided schools, hospitals and medical dispensaries were established. In 1908 Dr. James W. McKean set up a Leprosy Asylum in Chiangmai, which became known as the McKean Leprosy Hospital. Dr. Edwin C. Cort took over the medical work from McKean, opening a medical school in 1916 and a nursing school in 1923. In 1889 Rev. W. Clifton Dodd opened a school for Christian evangelists. This was closed in 1896 and re-opened by Rev. Henry White in 1912. It

¹⁵ Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua*, 19.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the significance of the edict see: Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua*, 29.

was known as the McGilvary Theological Seminary until 1956 when it was renamed the Thailand Theological Seminary.¹⁷

C. The Establishment of the Church of Christ in Siam

In 1922 the railroad line between Chiangmai and Bangkok was completed and the decision made to merge the two missions to form the Siam Mission which became known as the American Presbyterian Mission (APM). Shortly after APM began to consider establishing an independent national church. Dr. John Mott encouraged this development, inviting a group of Thai Christians and Protestant missionaries to discuss the findings of the IMC Jerusalem Conference in Bangkok in February 1929.¹⁸ Wells contends that the “Mott Conference evoked a new mind-set in the Christian leaders; thereafter they looked to the formation of an indigenous church.”¹⁹ On 6 January 1930 a Siam National Christian Council was organised.²⁰ The Council “requested the Synod of New York to release the North Siam and the South Siam Presbyteries in order that they might form a national church.”²¹ Two years later the new church held its first General Assembly and adopted the name: The Church of Christ in Siam. Although it was hoped that all Protestant bodies would join the church only the churches established by APM and the American Baptists chose to do so.²² The church was organised into six geographical districts or *pahks*, and an additional non-geographical district composed of all the Chinese churches. By the beginning of 1940 there were sixty-five organised churches, 8,600 members, thirty-nine schools and ten hospitals registered with the Church of Christ in Siam.²³

¹⁷ See Chapter Three: 4. A. 2. c), “Post Integration.”

¹⁸ International Missionary Council, “Findings of the Bangkok Conference called by John R. Mott, LL.D., Chairman of the International Missionary Council, Bangkok, 27 February-4 March 1929” (Bangkok: Bangkok Times Press, 1929).

¹⁹ Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 139.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

²² *Ibid.*, 144. For a review of the work of the American Baptists in Thailand see: McFarland, *Historical Sketch*, 27-34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 159.

3. The China Inland Mission: 1865-1953

A. The Founding of the China Inland Mission

CIM was founded by Hudson Taylor, an Englishman from Yorkshire, in 1865.²⁴ Taylor was made aware of the world-wide missionary movement as a child and after a conversion experience at the age of seventeen determined to go to China as a missionary. He decided to join the Chinese Evangelisation Society (CES), founded by Karl Gützlaff,²⁵ and sailed for China in September 1853, having cut short his medical training after receiving news of the Taiping rebellion in Southern China.²⁶ Taylor worked with CES until 1857 when he resigned from the mission, disheartened by their inadequate administration and provision of the work in China. After working independently for three years he returned to England where he completed his medical studies and tried to persuade established missionary organisations to initiate work in inland China. When they declined Taylor decided to form his own society. He travelled extensively throughout England raising awareness of the needs in China, recruiting personnel and eliciting funds. This included the publication of: *China: Its Spiritual Needs and Claims*.²⁷ In 1866 a group of twenty-two, including Taylor's own family, set sail for China on board the *Lammermuir* arriving in Shanghai on 30 September 1866. By the end of 1876 there were sixty missionaries working in five

²⁴ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 657-658; Taylor Howard, *Hudson Taylor in Early Years: The Growth of a Soul* 2nd ed. (London: CIM, 1912); Marshall, *Hudson Taylor: The Man who Believed God* (London: China Inland Mission, 1930). For a detailed historical account of the CIM see: A.J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, (7 vols), (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981-1987).

²⁵ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 272.

²⁶ The Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) began with the conversion of a Chinese peasant called Hong Xiuquan to Christianity. He initiated a religious movement that quickly developed into a rebellion. Hong considered himself and the movement he founded to be Christian. However, his claims to have been adopted as the second son of God meant that he and his movement were rejected by other nineteenth century Christians. Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 52-76.

²⁷ James Hudson Taylor, *China: Its Spiritual Needs and Claims* (London: China Inland Mission, 1865).

locations.²⁸ Numbers increased rapidly with the appeal for a further seventy workers in 1882, one hundred in 1887 and one thousand to be sent out by all Protestant missionary societies in 1890. CIM peaked numerically in 1934 with 1,368 missionaries in 364 locations, making it the largest missionary organisation in China.²⁹

Initially William Berger, a personal friend and supporter, managed the mission's affairs in England. However, the growing number of missionaries necessitated the appointment of a London Council in 1872. Taylor, who remained the principal authority in England and China, maintained that the council was "to advise with me when I was in England, and to act for me in home matters during my absence."³⁰ In 1866 a China Council was established and a deputy director, J.W. Stevenson, appointed. In 1888 Taylor was invited to speak in North America, prompting the emergence of an "American *Lammermuir* Party" which sailed for China in October 1888. In 1889 a North American Council was established and Henry Frost³¹ appointed as director. Eventually CIM established Home Councils in Australia (1890), New Zealand (1894), South Africa (1943).

B. Characteristics of the China Inland Mission

CIM policy was significantly influenced by Taylor's experiences with CES. Taylor did not permit the mission to solicit funds, would not offer CIM missionaries a guaranteed salary or entertain debt. He was convinced that such practices indicated a lack of trust in God. Taylor insisted that the mission was managed in China by a director rather than a committee. CIM's Principles and Practices stated: "As to guidance and direction, it was stated that in every respect what I deemed requisite

²⁸ Rosemary Seton, "The China Inland Mission: an Archivist's view," (paper presented at the Yale-Edinburgh Conference, 6-8 July 2000).

²⁹ Austin, "Pilgrims and Strangers: The China Inland Mission in Britain, Canada, the United States and China 1865-1901," 4.

³⁰ James Hudson Taylor, "A Retrospect," *China's Millions* (UK), (1888), 13.

³¹ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 230; Taylor Howard, *By Faith: Henry W. Frost the China Inland Mission* (Singapore: OMF, 1988).

must be complied with.”³² Taylor passed that authority on to Dixon Hoste³³ who succeeded him as General Director in 1901.

Taylor maintained that education and social class were of no consequence. He intentionally directed his appeal to the lower classes and at least initially attracted a high percentage of men and women with little or no education. Taylor prioritised the spiritual qualities of an individual above anything else. Hoste maintained the same standards.

“Hoste continually emphasized that educational and social advantage were not to be regarded as being of primary importance. The vital thing was that the men and women sent to China should know the power of prayer, and exercise it, be approved by their brethren, and know they were called of God to serve Him (*sic*) in China.”³⁴

The policy resulted in men and women, ordained and unordained, educated and uneducated working together as equal partners in the mission. Fiedler, however, contends that despite this policy CIM recruited an increasing percentage of graduates.³⁵

CIM prioritised evangelism. Latourette maintained, “the main purpose of the mission was not to win converts or to build up and educate a Christian community, but to diffuse as quickly as possible a knowledge of the Gospel through the Kingdom.”³⁶ CIM’s practice of engaging in evangelism rather than the discipling and pastoring of

³² James Hudson Taylor, “Principles and Practices,” in Mackay, “Faith and Facts in the History of the China Inland Mission,” 141. CIM’s Principles and Practices (P&P) articulate the mission’s attitudes toward mission practice. It was first drafted on the *Lammermuir* in 1867 but underwent numerous subsequent revisions.

³³ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 304-30; Phyllis Thompson, *D.E. Hoste* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1947).

³⁴ Thompson, *D.E. Hoste*, 112.

³⁵ Klaus Fiedler, *The Story of Faith Missions: From Hudson Taylor to Present Day Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1994), 137.

³⁶ K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), 386.

Christians caused Neil to critique their work as “dangerously superficial.”³⁷

However, mission policy did undergo changes that resulted in a greater emphasis on pastoring churches. Hoste reported that while the earlier work of CIM was “almost entirely pioneering and itinerating,” the mission was now “compelled to give attention to the instruction and training of converts.”³⁸ CIM was also involved in philanthropic work, combating social ills including opium smoking, foot binding, gambling, infanticide and concubinage. They encouraged churches to operate their own primary schools and provided a few high schools. By 1913 they had established nine hospitals and sixty-eight dispensaries as well as orphanages, industrial schools and schools for the blind.³⁹

At the suggestion of Dr. Medhurst,⁴⁰ of LMS, Taylor adopted Chinese dress while still working with CES. He became convinced that a close identification with Chinese culture provided the most effective means of evangelising the Chinese and insisted that all CIM missionaries comply. The practice remained controversial amongst the expatriate community in China. MacKay contends that Chinese dress “presupposed Chinese manners and etiquette which comprised an elaborate code against which Europeans could not fail to offend.”⁴¹ Taylor himself recognised that,

For many Westerners, including the missionary community of the time, the thought of adopting Chinese dress was demeaning and repulsive. There was a genuine fear that the ‘respect’ or deference a Chinese would give a Westerner would be eroded if Western clothing were abandoned and Chinese manners assumed.⁴²

The practice was not abandoned until 1907.

³⁷ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 336.

³⁸ Thompson, *D.E. Hoste*, 106.

³⁹ Leslie T. Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible: The China Inland Mission 1865-1965* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), 81. Armerding argues that the mission “subordinated and utilised without apology philanthropic institutions.” (Armerding, “The China Inland Mission and Some Aspects of its Work,” 37).

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission*, 451.

⁴¹ Mackay, “Faith and Facts,” 103.

⁴² J. H. Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* (London; Philadelphia: Morgan & Scott; China Inland Mission, 1918), 405.

C. The China Inland Mission and the Establishment of an Independent National Church

The Chinese Communist party was formed in 1921 and the Chinese churches found themselves facing increasingly hostile opposition. The anti-Christian movement reached a peak in 1927. After Nanking fell on 24 March 1927 all missionaries were asked to leave the interior. CIM, meeting to discuss the future, decided it was imperative to hasten the transition from mission control to national control. Chinese Christians and foreign missionaries collaborated in that process. The transition culminated in October 1943 when the China Council of CIM “agreed that the Mission would offer its services as an auxiliary agency to the Church; its members would serve within the local churches in a co-operative capacity and under the local church leadership.”⁴³

The Communist Government was established in China in 1949. At that time there were still 737 CIM missionaries in China. In May 1950 Chou En-lai called a meeting of Chinese Christian leaders in Peking. The meeting produced a Manifesto, which stated that the Chinese Christian churches had agreed to rid themselves of all imperialist influences and welcome the leadership of the Communist party.⁴⁴ Shortly after CIM made the decision to withdraw from China. The last CIM missionary left China in 1953.

After its withdrawal from China CIM decided to continue its missionary activity in other parts of Southeast Asia. Initially they were interested in working with the Chinese scattered throughout Southeast Asia and the hill tribes they had been working with in southern China that had migrated south into Thailand, Laos and Burma. However, they became progressively more interested in other nationalities, including the Thai.

⁴³ Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible*, 125.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 164.

4. The Theological Orientation of the American Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship

The remainder of this chapter will briefly review the emergence of the ecumenical and evangelical movements, summarise the different approaches taken by those movements toward mission-church relations, other faiths, and other cultures and detail APM's and OMF's relationship to those movements. It will argue in conclusion that while APM was deeply committed to the ecumenical movement CIM/OMF was not, prioritising "adherence to basic concepts ahead of union."⁴⁵ This theological orientation provides the background to Part Two, which will demonstrate that the missions' relationship with the movements significantly influenced their mission policy, APM open and willing to learn from the ecumenical movement, OMF reluctant to work with any organisation associated with the ecumenical movement and unreceptive to missiological insights espoused by that movement.

A. The Emergence of the Ecumenical and Evangelical Movements

The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910 was an ecumenical watershed. The Continuation Committee, set up to advance the work of the conference, created a large number of National Christian Councils that formed the International Missionary Council (IMC) in 1921. IMC organised two world-missionary conferences before the Second World War: Jerusalem (1928) and Tambaram (1938) and three conferences afterwards: Whitby (1947), Willingen (1953) and Ghana (1957/8). In 1948 the Faith and Order Movement and the Life and Work Movement merged to form the World Council of Churches (WCC). WCC held world conferences at Amsterdam (1948), Evanston (1954), New Delhi (1961), Uppsala (1968), Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983), Canberra (1991) and Harare (1998). At the third assembly of the WCC, New Delhi (1961), the IMC was integrated into WCC and has since been known as the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). CWME organised world conferences at Mexico City (1963), Bangkok (1973), Melbourne (1980) and San Antonio (1989).

⁴⁵ Armerding, "The China Inland Mission and Some Aspects of its Work," 35-36.

Evangelicals became concerned by what they perceived to be the growing acceptance of theological liberalism in the ecumenical movement and loss of missionary vision. They wanted to continue IMC independently of WCC. Evangelical world conferences were held at Wheaton (1966) and Berlin (1966) before the decisive International Congress on World Evangelisation held at Lausanne (1974) that produced the *Lausanne Covenant*. The congress formed the Lausanne Committee for Evangelisation (LCWE), a loose coalition of persons, mission agencies and Christian organisations sharing a common theological position and a common missionary and evangelistic purpose. LCWE has organised biennial meetings since 1974. In 1989 LCWE convened the Second International Congress on World Evangelisation at Manila, popularly called Lausanne II, which produced the *Manila Manifesto*.

B. Ecumenical Mission Theology

1. The Relationship between Churches/Missions in the North and Churches/Missions in the South

Edinburgh (1910) did not address the relationship between church and mission, 'older' and 'younger' churches. Jerusalem (1928) began to discuss the issues but did not challenge the subdivision of the world into two large geographical areas, the one Christian, the other non-Christian.⁴⁶ Tambaram (1938) abandoned the distinction between Christian and non-Christian areas, accepting that Europe and North America were also mission fields. It adopted the term 'partnership' to describe the relationship between the 'older' and 'younger' churches. The definition of that term was greatly elaborated at Whitby (1947). The conference stressed the equality of the churches and proposed a different relationship between them, characterised by "partnership in obedience."⁴⁷ Willingen (1952) began to develop the theological foundation for partnership employing the term *missio Dei*. Mission was understood to be the movement of the Triune God to the world, through the church. In the context of *missio Dei*, mission was the responsibility of every church in every situation. Ghana

⁴⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 169.

⁴⁷ C.W. Ranson, ed., *Renewal and Advance: Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World. The Whitby Meeting of the IMC, July 1947* (London: Edinburgh House, 1948).

(1957/8) moved this vision one step further, maintaining that it was no longer valid to speak of 'older' and 'younger' churches, or of mission as one-way from North to South; it insisted that mission must be in partnership, which means the end of every form of custodianship of one church by another. Mexico City (1963) celebrated witness in six continents: "The common witness of the whole Church, bringing the whole Gospel to the whole world."⁴⁸

However, what had been decided in principle was far more difficult to effect in practice. Bosch contends that, "[a] donor syndrome is still very much in evidence in the affluent churches of the West and a dependency syndrome in the churches of the Third World."⁴⁹ At Bangkok (1973) the churches in the South confronted those in the North, challenging the perceived inconsistency between principle and practice. They insisted that partnership was an empty slogan, arguing that the relationships between the churches in the North and those in the South were characterised by dominance and dependence, not partnership.⁵⁰ They called for a radical review of those relationships and many argued for a moratorium on all mission personnel and mission funds. During the later half of the twentieth century the churches in the North and South have continued to work toward the establishment of a partnership based on equality, rather than one that perpetuates inequality.

2. The Christian Response to Other Faiths

Edinburgh (1910) expressed a confidence that Christianity was the fulfilment of, and would shortly eclipse, all other faiths.⁵¹ By Jerusalem (1928) that confidence had begun to decline. A growing number of people held that Christianity, like the other

⁴⁸ Ronald K. Orchard, ed., *Witness in Six Continents: Records of the Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in Mexico City, 8-19 December 1963* (London: Edinburgh House, 1964), 175.

⁴⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 380-381.

⁵⁰ *Bangkok Assembly 1973: Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 31 December 1972 and 9-12 January 1973* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, n.d.), 116-117.

⁵¹ Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995), 181-260.

religions, was relative. IMC commissioned Hendrik Kraemer to write *The Christian Message in the Non-Christian World* for Tambaram (1938).⁵² Kraemer acknowledged the presence of spiritual truth in religions other than Christianity but maintained that spiritual truth revealed by God in Christ is qualitatively and quantitatively different to spiritual truth revealed in nature, reason and history.

Whitby (1947), Willingen (1953) and Ghana (1957/8) were primarily concerned with ecclesiological concerns and did not make a significant contribution to the debate. Mexico City (1963), however, instigated a prolonged inquiry into the Christian approach to other faiths. Before Uppsala (1968) a subunit on “Dialogue with Men (*sic*) of Living Faiths and Ideologies” was added to the WCC Program Unit on Faith and Witness. In 1971 this subunit presented the WCC Central Committee with an interim policy statement on dialogue. On the basis of this statement the WCC Central Committee produced preliminary guidelines on dialogue. The consultation: “Dialogue in Community” in Chiangmai, Thailand (1977), broke new ground and resulted in the revision of WCC preliminary guidelines on dialogue adopted in 1971 and the production of an official WCC policy statement on dialogue: “Guidelines on Dialogue” in 1979.⁵³ This affirmed WCC’s commitment to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and their respect for the integrity of the dialogue partner. Dialogue was understood to be a means of enhancing the understanding of one’s own faith, of promoting good relationships with those of other faiths and engaging in a common struggle for peace and justice. The statement emphasised dialogue between communities of differing faith rather than between individual scholars and stressed the responsibility Christians have to promote peace and justice in partnership with members of other faiths. It did not envision any discrepancy between dialogue and witness, maintaining:

⁵² Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House, 1938).

⁵³ *Dialogue in Community: Statements and Reports of a Theological Consultation, Chiangmai, Thailand, 18-27 April 1977* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977) and *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979).

We do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness.⁵⁴

It insisted that:

The aim of dialogue is not reduction of living faiths and ideologies to the lowest common denominator, not only a comparison and discussion of symbols and concepts, but the enabling of a true encounter between those spiritual insights and experiences which are only found at the deepest level of human life.⁵⁵

However, dialogue remained a controversial matter and Christians expressed conflicting understandings of the relationship between dialogue and mission, some believing dialogue would contribute to mission, others that dialogue would blunt the cutting edge of mission.

In 1982 the document: "An Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism," a product of CWME, was approved by the WCC Central Committee. Scherer and Bevans described the document as "the single most important ecumenical statement on mission in this period."⁵⁶ It delineates seven convictions of ecumenical missionary practice, one of which is witness among people of living faiths. The document states that in the past Christians "have passed negative judgement upon other religions" and calls for humble witness.⁵⁷ It affirms the "decisive presence of God in Christ" and agrees that Christians should witness to all while recognising that God "has not left Himself (*sic*) without witness at any time or any place."⁵⁸ It accepts that there are different understandings about how salvation in Christ is available to people of other faiths. It contends that dialogue is a two-way process and that in

⁵⁴ *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979), 11.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

⁵⁶ James A. Scherer and Stephen B. Bevans (eds), *New Directions in Mission and Evangelisation 1: Basic Statements 1974-1991* (New York: Orbis, 1992), 36.

⁵⁷ "An Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism" in Scherer and Bevans (eds), *New Directions 1*, 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

dialogue “Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way He (*sic*) deals with humanity.”⁵⁹

3. The Christian Response to Other Cultures

The WCC conference in Vancouver (1983) included an issue group on culture. The group’s report acknowledged that in the past Christian missionaries dismissed indigenous cultures as inimical to the Gospel and promoted the Christianisation and Westernisation of indigenous cultures. The report recognised that,

[m]any missionaries did not realise that the Gospel they preached was already influenced by centuries-old-interaction with many and different cultures and that they were at this point imposing a culturally bound Christian proclamation on other people. Neither did they realise that they were in fact inhibiting the Gospel from taking root in the cultural soil in which it had come.⁶⁰

The report recommended that Christian missionaries should strongly encourage indigenous expressions of Christianity. It maintained that the power of the Gospel is demonstrated in and through culturally relevant manifestations of the Gospel stating:

The Gospel message becomes a transforming power within the life of a community when it is expressed in the cultural forms in which the community understands itself.⁶¹

C. Evangelical Mission Theology

1. The Relationship between Churches/Missions in the North and Churches/Missions in the South

Many evangelical organisations that currently identify with LCWE participated in Whitby (1947), Willingen (1953) and Ghana (1957/8) and fully support the ideal of partnership developed there. The *Lausanne Covenant* echoed earlier IMC statements. It recognises that mission is the responsibility of the whole church stating: “World evangelisation requires the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada, 24 July to 10 August 1983* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 33.

⁶¹ Ibid.

world.”⁶² It accepts that “the dominant role of western missions is fast disappearing” and that “God is raising up from the younger churches a great new resource for world evangelisation.”⁶³ It supports a partial moratorium suggesting: “A reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelised country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church’s growth in self-reliance and release resources for unevangelised areas.”⁶⁴ The Manila Manifesto reiterates those statements insisting: “We are determined to put behind us once and for all, as a hangover from the colonial past, the simplistic distinction between First World sending and Two-Thirds World receiving countries.”⁶⁵

2. The Christian Response to Other Faiths

The *Lausanne Covenant* affirms the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ, maintaining that all are lost and salvation is in Christ alone. It rejects the WCC interpretation of other faiths and their position on dialogue as ambiguous. It contends that evangelisation, Christian presence and dialogue may be distinguished from one another and emphatically prioritises evangelism. However, it suggests that evangelism may be accompanied by dialogue stating: “Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand.”⁶⁶

The *Manila Manifesto* affirms the “uniqueness, indispensability and centrality of Christ.”⁶⁷ It accepts that other faiths “sometimes contain elements of truth and beauty” but insists that Christians “have no warrant for saying that salvation can be found outside Christ...or apart from an explicit acceptance of his work through faith.”⁶⁸ It rejects “both the relativism which regards all religions and spiritualities as equally valid approaches to God, and the syncretism which tries to mix faith in Christ

⁶² *The Lausanne Covenant* in Scherer and Bevans (eds), *New Directions 1*, 256.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁶⁵ *The Manila Manifesto* in Scherer and Bevans (eds), *New Directions 1*, 301.

⁶⁶ *The Lausanne Covenant* in Scherer and Bevans (eds), *New Directions 1*, 255.

⁶⁷ *The Manila Manifesto* in Scherer and Bevans (eds), *New Directions 1*, 296.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

with other faiths.”⁶⁹ It repents of wrong attitudes towards other faiths, “attitudes of ignorance, arrogance, disrespect and even hostility” but maintains that Christians must continue to “bear a positive and uncompromising witness.”⁷⁰

3. The Christian Response to Other Cultures

The Consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank in 1978 represents the evangelical’s most significant work on Gospel and culture. The consultation rejected the excessively negative views of culture associated with previous evangelicalism, and argued that culture consists of negative, positive and neutral elements. It explored ways in which the Gospel could be inculturated in any culture, affirming and adopting positive and neutral elements within a culture while confronting and rejecting negative elements. It celebrates the inculturation process while warning the church and mission against the twin dangers of theological imperialism and theological provincialism.

D. The Missions’ Relationship with the Ecumenical and Evangelical Movements

1. APM’s Commitment to the Ecumenical Movement

PCUSA, and hence APM, were committed to the ecumenical movement from its beginning in Edinburgh (1910), participating in and contributing to the ecumenical movement throughout the 20th century. PCUSA and the Thai church established by APM, CCT, were founding members of WCC in 1948 and have continued to be actively involved in the world-wide ecumenical movement since that time. Thus, missiological insights emerging out of the ecumenical movement have had a significant influence on both APM in Thailand and CCT.

2. CIM’s/OMF’s withdrawal from the Ecumenical Movement and Affiliation with the Evangelical Movement

Initially CIM was a committed member of the ecumenical movement and was well represented at Edinburgh 1910. It participated in the Continuation Committee, set up

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 297.

in Shanghai in 1913, and the National Christian Conference, held in 1922. Shortly after, however, it withdrew from all ecumenical organisations. Lyall insists that theological liberalism prompted the decision contending that, “The theological issues had by then become acute.”⁷¹ Armerding offers a similar, though less sympathetic assessment, maintaining that CIM was “convinced that the Council [NCC] was too much at variance with orthodox Christianity” and concluded that, “CIM placed adherence to basic concepts ahead of union.”⁷² Following CIM’s withdrawal from the ecumenical movement it was unwilling to formally associate with churches and para-church organisations affiliated with the ecumenical movement and was unreceptive to the missiological insights espoused by the ecumenical movement.

OMF now lends its support to the Lausanne Movement and OMF missionaries have participated in meetings organised by LCWE. This does not, however, involve formal membership of LCWE. Rather, organisations, such as OMF, participate in a loose coalition, which supports the ideals of LCWE.

5. Conclusion

It is evident that there were significant differences between APM and OMF. APM originated as a mission of a national church, PCUSA. OMF came into being as a distinct para-church organisation. By 1946 the American Presbyterians had been working in Thailand for over one hundred years. They had established themselves as the largest Protestant mission in Thailand and had had a critical influence on the founding of the national Protestant church, the Church of Christ in Siam, which they encouraged all Christian organisations to associate with. Thus American Presbyterian missionaries, entering Thailand after the Second World War, were able to draw on a wealth of experience and expertise available to them from other American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians. CIM, on the other hand, had no experience of working with the Thai or in Thailand prior to 1952. As a single field mission it had been committed to working exclusively with the Chinese in China. CIM’s decision to withdraw from the ecumenical movement meant that it was

⁷¹ Lyall, *A Passion for the Impossible*, 88.

⁷² Armerding, “The China Inland Mission and Some Aspects of its Work,” 35-36.

unwilling to work with other Protestant missions and churches associated with the movement and thus restricted in how far it could draw on the wealth of experience and expertise of American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians. Both missions, however, were committed to the emergence of independent national churches, APM because of its commitment to the ecumenical movement and the ideas being expounded there, OMF because of its experiences in China. Part Two will explore how these dissimilar heritages influenced the work of OMF and APM in Thailand after the Second World War.

PART TWO:
THE AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN
MISSION AND THE OVERSEAS
MISSIONARY FELLOWSHIP IN
THAILAND: 1946-1998

Part Two: The American Presbyterian Mission and Overseas Missionary Fellowship in Thailand: 1946-1998

Part Two will analyse the work of the American Presbyterians and OMF in Thailand after the Second World War. It will examine the relationship between the missions and the indigenous churches they planted and ask how far the missionaries' attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture influenced those relationships. It will explore the missionaries' attitudes towards and understanding of Thai Buddhism, particularly the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, and consider how they communicated the Gospel to Thai Buddhists.

Chapter Three: The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand: 1946-1998

1. Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of APM in Thailand begun in Chapter Two. It is divided into two parts. The first part offers a concise history of APM and CCT. The second part consists of a more detailed exploration of the relationship between APM and CCT and the understandings of evangelism that emerged out of that mission-church partnership. The chapter will argue that when the Presbyterians returned to Thailand after the war they committed themselves to work in partnership with CCT and set out to integrate the mission into the church. It will show that the ecclesiastical vision of partnership proved extremely difficult to effect in practice, being complicated by the legacy of patron-client relationships that had existed prior to the war. The chapter will contend that in the process of integrating themselves into CCT the Presbyterians committed themselves to developing a new relationship with Thai Buddhist culture that entailed the acceptance and utilisation of Thai Buddhist culture in the church. However, the question of the relationship between the Gospel and Thai Buddhism remained unresolved.

2. Part One

A. A Concise History of the American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand: 1946-1998

1. Mission Interrupted: The Second World War

PCUSA managed its missionary movement through BFM. A mission organisation was established wherever personnel were sent. The mission was composed of missionaries appointed by BFM and was responsible for BFM's work in that area. It defined the evangelistic outreach, decided where schools and hospitals should be established, supervised orientation and language study of new missionaries, determined the salaries of national workers and orchestrated negotiations with government administrators. The missions were significantly more powerful than the

national churches they established. However, most were not unduly alarmed, since they assumed that “the developing church would progressively assume responsibility.”¹ APM in Siam began to hand over responsibility to the Church of Christ in Siam before the war. In 1934 the mission asked the church to accept responsibility for Pitsanuloke station including the school, hospital and evangelistic work.² Two other mission hospitals were leased to the Church of Christ in Siam: the Van Santvood Hospital in Lampang in 1936 and the mission hospital in Nakhon Sritamraat in 1937.³ Boards of Directors were set up over a number of schools in order to provide a forum for Thai Christians to become involved in their management.⁴

The gradual transition from mission to church control was interrupted by the Japanese invasion on 8 December 1941. Missionaries in the North crossed the border into Burma; those in the South were interned and repatriated. Mission and church affairs were left entirely in the hands of the church. During the war Christians were singled out for persecution. The intensity of the persecution varied. In some areas Christians were coerced to renounce their faith and churches were closed. Schools and hospitals, established by APM and staffed predominately by Thai Christians, struggled to remain open, were closed or taken over by the Japanese military or Thai government. Despite the hostilities the General Assembly of CCT was successfully convened in 1942, 1943 and 1944, church officers travelled throughout the country teaching, preaching and offering pastoral support, and many Thai Christians refused to renounce their faith.⁵ At the end of the war the officers of CCT sent a cable to BFM asking the missionaries to return.⁶

¹ Donald Black, *Merging Mission and Unity* (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1986), 64.

² Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 145.

³ Ibid. 147.

⁴ Ibid. 148.

⁵ There are numerous documents detailing events in Thailand during the war. For a good summary see, Dr. Kenneth Wells to Dr. Hooper, 14 May 1946, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; and Lucy Starling, “War Stories” (paper presented at BFM Field Representative Staff Seminar, 25 April – 9 May 1958), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁶ Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 162.

After the war Britain and France maintained that Thailand should be penalised for its alliance with Japan and declaration of war against the USA and Britain. The USA, however, intervened. They pointed out that members of the Thai government had refused to sign the declaration of war and organised an anti-Japanese movement in Thailand during the war, known as the *Free Thai Movement*. The USA, which had long since recognised the importance of an independent Thai nation as a potential bastion against the rise of communism in Southeast Asia, successfully curbed Britain's and France's demands for compensation and initiated a program of mass investment in Thailand. The return of Christian missions to Thailand reinforced its international policy in Southeast Asia.

2. APM Policy: The Relationship between Mission and Church

Before the war the mission exerted a considerable influence over church affairs. However, the enforced isolation of the Thai church during the war prompted BFM and CCT to reconsider the relationship between mission and church in general and the APM and CCT in particular. BFM became increasingly convinced that the missionary enterprise was the responsibility of the church and should be managed by the church, and that independent missionary organisations should be integrated into established churches. It decided that the American Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand should be integrated into CCT and APM terminated.⁷

3. APM Policy: The Relationship between existing Missions and Churches

Both PCUSA and CCT were founding members of WCC. They were unwavering in their commitment to work with all Christian organisations, missions and churches. APM actively encouraged other Protestant missions and churches in Thailand to work with the established Protestant church in Thailand, CCT. It encouraged all churches to join WCC. For these reasons APM was extremely concerned by the large numbers of Protestant missionaries entering Thailand in the 1950s who were

⁷ Black, *Merging Mission and Unity*, 66. See also Stanley W. Rycroft, *The Ecumenical Witness of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States*, 160-163.

unwilling to work with CCT and refused to associate with WCC. However, it remained open at any time to consider closer working relationships with these missions and associated churches.

4. APM and CCT Priorities: 1946-1998

a) Immediate Assistance

BFM was committed to providing assistance immediately after the war. It did not, however, want to re-establish APM without careful consideration of the post-war context and in consultation with CCT. It selected a group of missionaries to return to Thailand immediately. These were identified as 'group 'A' missionaries. BFM appointed similar groups of missionaries to all the countries in which they had been working before the war. On 19-21 November 1945 these missionaries gathered at a 'Conference of Group 'A' Missionaries.' They were designated to restore the relationship between PCUSA and the national churches, to relieve suffering and to evangelise.⁸ On 23 November 1945 the group 'A' missionaries due to return to Thailand met together. They were asked to act as representatives of BFM in Thailand in order to receive back the mission property that had been appropriated by the Thai government during the war.⁹ In February 1946, Rev. and Mrs. Paul A. Eakin and Dr. and Mrs. Edwin C. Cort arrived in Thailand and by November that year a total of twenty-five American Presbyterian missionaries had returned.¹⁰ APM was not formally re-established during this initial post-war period. Instead an Emergency Executive Committee was organised to supervise the missionary enterprise. Paul Eakin was initially elected as chair of that committee, and was later replaced by Mrs. Graham Fuller.

The missionaries discovered that the good relationship between APM and the Thai government established before the war was enhanced by the favourable status of Americans in Thailand after the war. The government was willing to do anything

⁸ Group 'A' Conference Papers, 19-21 November 1945, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹ Group 'A' Conference Papers, 23 November 1945, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Planning Conference, 11-16 November 1946, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

they could to assist the American missionaries. Prasit argued that, “This was because of national pride and the sense of obligation to the US.”¹¹ Dr. Kenneth Wells, travelling to North Thailand to reclaim mission property, was provided with an official document requiring all concerned to, “[l]et the transfer take place with all possible speed and to the satisfaction of Dr. Wells. By so doing we [Thais] can reciprocate the kindness of the US which has helped Siam in so many ways, as you know.”¹² With the ready assistance of the Thai government American Presbyterian missionaries were able to reclaim the mission properties and institutions commandeered by the government during the war. Churches, schools and hospitals were reopened.

Within eighteen months the Church World Service had delivered nineteen shipments of aid valued at US\$250,000.¹³ Government officials, missionaries and Thai Christians were responsible for distributing this, which contributed to the popularity of American missionaries. One missionary commented: “Americans were so in favour that it was sometimes embarrassing. APM could get anything it wanted.”¹⁴

b) Towards Integration

In October 1946 a deputation from BFM arrived in Thailand. The deputation, consisting of eight members of BFM, was joined by the twenty-five American Presbyterian missionaries who had already returned to Thailand and sixteen delegates from CCT. It visited the churches and institutions established by APM before gathering on 11-16 November for a planning conference. At the conference the deputation from BFM, missionaries and Thai Christians sought to delineate specific mission-church priorities. Together they agreed to prioritise the re-opening of the Bible school in Chiangmai, the opening of an institute for higher education either in Bangkok or Chiangmai, and a Christian hospital in Bangkok. The

¹¹ Prasit, *A History of the Church of Christ in Thailand*, 108.

¹² Thai Government to “Whom it May Concern,” 1946, in Dr. Kenneth Wells, Bangkok, to Dr. Donald MacCluer, BFM, New York, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹³ Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 164.

¹⁴ Winnie Burr-Stewart, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson, 8 October 1978, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

conference also discussed the relationship between APM and CCT. Those present at the conference were keen to establish a new working relationship between the mission and the church in which the church, rather than the mission, would be increasingly dominant. With this in mind a Joint Advisory Council was set up consisting of the Executive Committee of APM and CCT respectively. The council was responsible for advising the Executive Committees of the church and the mission on the work in Thailand. A series of Joint Advisory Committees were also set up under the Joint Advisory Council composed of equal numbers of Thai Christians and American missionaries. Both the mission and the church perceived this to be the first step towards the full integration of the mission into the church.¹⁵

On return to the USA the deputation met with BFM in March 1947 and recommended the reestablishment of APM in Thailand. BFM appointed Rev. Horace Ryburn, who had worked as an American Presbyterian missionary in Thailand before the war, as Field Administrator with authority to act as representative of BFM in Thailand. He was to convene and administer the mission and given responsibility for a budget of over US\$600,000.¹⁶ Ryburn was fully briefed about BFM's vision for the church and the mission in Thailand. Ryburn understood, and was in full agreement with, BFM's intention to integrate the mission into the church. Ryburn later recalled that it was the BFM's intention "that Thai leadership would emerge and emerge rapidly and that we [APM] get away from the old fashioned way of doing things."¹⁷ Ryburn returned to Thailand on 27 December 1947. On 26-29 April 1948 all the American Presbyterian missionaries met in Chiangmai, the mission was formally re-established and an Executive Committee and members of the Joint Advisory Committees were elected.¹⁸ A joint mission-church planning conference, attended by the American Presbyterian missionaries and fifty delegates from the CCT, was held

¹⁵ Minutes of the Planning Conference, 11-16 November 1946, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁶ Minutes and Recommendations of the Special Committee on Siam to the Foreign Department Committee, 18 March 1947, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁷ Rev. Horace Ryburn, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson, 28 December 1978, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Meeting of the Siam Mission, 26-29 April 1948, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

immediately afterwards, 29 April – 1 May.¹⁹ This enabled American missionaries and Thai Christians to join together in planning the work in Thailand.

Initially the Joint Advisory Council had a merely advisory function, making its recommendations to either the mission or church Executive Committees. However, by 1950 the council was gaining executive authority. In December 1950 the mission's budget for evangelism was turned over to the church. In 1954 the first church committee was formed, the Christian Education and Literature Committee.²⁰ This committee replaced the Joint Advisory Committee previously responsible for Christian education and literature.

On 30-31 January 1955 an Evaluation Conference was held in Thailand. Delegates from APM and CCT as well as a deputation from the BFM gathered to evaluate their work in Thailand and their relationship with one another. The conference recommended that APM in Thailand should be closed and American Presbyterian missionaries integrated into CCT. BFM would then deal directly with CCT and the American Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand would be directly responsible to CCT.²¹

On 22 April – 5 May 1956 representatives of American Presbyterian Missions throughout the world, representatives of the associated churches and BFM met at Lake Mohonk, New York, to discuss their work and their relationships with one another. Ryburn and Rev. Leck Taiyong, General Secretary of CCT, were designated to represent APM in Thailand and CCT. The Lake Mohonk consultation reiterated the recommendations of the Evaluation Conference and proposed that all American Presbyterian missions should be progressively integrated into their associated churches.²²

¹⁹ Minutes of the Planning Conference, 29 April – 1 May, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²⁰ Rev. Horace Ryburn, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

²¹ Minutes of the Evaluation Conference, 30-31 January 1956, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²² Black, *Merging Mission and Unity*, 62-73. See also Stanley W. Rycroft, *The Ecumenical Witness of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States*, 163-170.

On 8 August 1956 the American Presbyterians in Thailand formally accepted the recommendations of the Lake Mohonk Consultation. The remaining Joint Advisory Committees were constituted as church committees and the mission's budget for education, medical work and audio-visual work was turned over to the church.²³ On 16 August 1957 CCT and representatives of BFM formally enacted the end of APM and the integration of the American Presbyterian missionaries into CCT. BFM dissolved the mission and "commended the fraternal workers in Thailand to the CCT for assignment, guidance and pastoral care, and relinquished to the CCT the right to the creation of policy and the administration of the work."²⁴ CCT accepted full responsibility for the church and for the American Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand. American Presbyterian missionaries were renamed American Presbyterian fraternal workers and a Fraternal Workers' Affairs Committee (FWAC) was set up to meet their specific needs. At that time there were forty-three American Presbyterian fraternal workers in Thailand. CCT asked the Board for an additional forty-three fraternal workers and a budget of US\$500,000 over the next five years.²⁵

c) Post Integration

By 1966 there were eighty American Presbyterians working in CCT. Although they were responsible to CCT many used their prestige as Americans, and the financial resources available to them in the USA, to pursue their own visions. Rev. Francis Prichard, who served as Personnel Consultant for Asia for the Commission between 1969-1977, explained that some fraternal workers were frustrated with the limitations they faced working within CCT and began to "carve out their own positions."²⁶

Ryburn, serving as Commission Representative, was arguably the most influential. He worked in the United Presbyterian Church (UPC) office that was situated within

²³ Rev. Horace Ryburn, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

²⁴ An Action of the Thailand Mission Requesting the Board to Dissolve the Mission and to Integrate its Life and Work with the Church of Christ in Thailand, 16 August 1957, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²⁵ Prasit, *A History of the Church of Christ in Thailand*, 137.

²⁶ Rev. Francis Prichard, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson, 5 December 1978, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

the head office of CCT in Bangkok.²⁷ He maintained strong patron-client relationships with many Thai Christians in CCT, including a number of church officers. Rev. Robert Collins, an American Presbyterian fraternal worker who arrived in Thailand in 1958, commented that, “almost everybody was in some sense indebted to him [Ryburn].”²⁸ Ryburn was at liberty to join all CCT committees including the CCT Executive Committee.²⁹ Collins reflected: “I don’t think he intended to cling to power, but the force of his personality and the position he held as Commission Representative, if you put the two together you had no hope.”³⁰

American Presbyterians were particularly influential in theological education, graduate education and rural development. The Thailand Theological Seminary was staffed largely by American Presbyterians.³¹ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, who had been working as an American Presbyterian missionary in China before 1949, was Principle of the seminary from 1956 to 1974. Hamlin’s education, experience and current post contributed to his esteemed position and enhanced his influence in the lives of individuals at the seminary and the churches where he worked. In accordance with Thai culture, Thai students maintained a deferential attitude towards Hamlin throughout their lives, even if promoted above him. Hamlin explained that in Thailand, “the authority of teacher is so great and the model of teacher so important.”³²

²⁷ In 1958 PCUSA and the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA) merged to form the United Presbyterian Church (UPC).

²⁸ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean, 20 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

²⁹ Rev. Francis Younkin, interview by Patricia McLean, 26 February 2001, by phone.

³⁰ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean

³¹ The Laos Mission opened a school for evangelists in 1889. The name of that school/seminary has been changed on a number of occasions. Between 1912-1956 it was known as the McGilvary Theological Seminary. In 1956 Hamlin renamed the institution the Thailand Theological Seminary (TTS). In 1979 the seminary was integrated into Payap College and when the college gained the status of a university in 1984 the seminary became the Theological Faculty of Payap University. See Chapter Two: B., “The Laos Mission.”

³² Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson, August-September 1982, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

In 1946 CCT and BFM agreed to prioritise the opening of a Christian institute for higher education. When the Thai government repeatedly denied the mission/church permission to establish a private institute, the missionaries/fraternal workers pioneered the establishment of two Student Christian Centres (SCC), one in Bangkok and one in Chiangmai. These provided residential accommodation for Christians and Buddhists studying at state universities as well as additional lectures and seminars. American Presbyterians served as Directors of these SCCs, Dr. Ray Downs in Bangkok and Rev. Donald McIlvride in Chiangmai. When the government eventually permitted the establishment of private institutions of higher education in 1969 Dr. Konrad Kingshill, also an American Presbyterian, was invited to oversee the development. Kingshill was instrumental in bringing about the foundation of Payap College in 1974 and its conversion to a university in 1984.

American Presbyterians were actively involved in rural development work. Rev. Forrest Travaille founded the Chiangrai Rural Project that developed a Christian community based on 1,200 acres of land given by the government, and set up an agricultural training school. Travaille served as Director from the project's foundation in 1946 to his retirement in 1969.³³ Rev. Dr. Laurence Judd carried out similar rural development work in Nan province and served as Associate Director of the Rural Life Department of CCT.³⁴ American Presbyterians were also involved in CCT's medical work including the new Bangkok Christian Hospital opened in 1949. However, Thai Christians, and not American Presbyterians, were primarily responsible for the management of the hospitals.

³³ Rev. Forrest Travaille, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson, 4 November 1978, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁴ See: L. C. Judd, "*Chao Rai Thai: Dry Rice Farmers in Northern Thailand*" (Ph.D., Cornell University, 1961), edited and republished as *Chao Rai Thai: Dry Rice Farmers in North Thailand, A Study of Ten Hamlets Practicing Swidden Agriculture and Restudy Twenty Years Later* (Bangkok: Suriyabun, 1977) and idem, *A Vision to Some...A Case Study of Rural Development Activities by a NGO in Thailand: The Rural Life Department of the Church of Christ in Thailand: 1961-1970* (Bangkok: Suriyabun, 1987).

d) Further Integration

Both fraternal workers and Thai Christians were convinced that the fraternal workers needed to be more effectively integrated into the church. However, neither the fraternal workers nor the Thai Christians approached by Ryburn were able to suggest ways in which this might be achieved.³⁵ The Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR)³⁶ was keen to dispatch a deputation to discuss the matter with the church officers but Ryburn contended that it would be more appropriate to appoint one member of the Commission to make an informal visit.³⁷ Dr. Wilson arrived in December 1970.³⁸ In consultation with the church officers Wilson recommended a 'Plan of Operation'.³⁹ This involved the closure of the office of Commission Representative and the creation of a Department of Ecumenical Relations under the General Secretary of CCT. The Secretary of the Department of Ecumenical Relations would be responsible for the welfare of the fraternal workers. FWACs would continue but the Moderator, General Secretary and Treasurer of CCT would be invited to join the four fraternal workers elected to serve on FWAC. In 1972 the Plan of Operation was ratified. Ryburn resigned as Commission Representative and was appointed as Coordinator of Concerns for Missionaries and Fraternal Workers during the reconstruction.⁴⁰ In January 1973 the Department of Ecumenical Relations was opened and Ryburn appointed as Secretary of the department.

e) Budget Cuts and the Loss of Personnel

³⁵ Rev. Horace Ryburn to Dr. Theodore F Romig, 27 January 1970, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁶ When PCUSA and UPCNA merged to form UPC in 1958 the two boards of foreign mission were replaced by the Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations (COEMAR). COEMAR was replaced by the Program Agency when UPC was reorganised in 1972. See Stanley W. Rycroft, *The Ecumenical Witness of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States*, 170.

³⁷ Rev. Horace Ryburn to Dr. Theodore F Romig, 27 January 1970, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁸ Rev. Horace Ryburn to American Presbyterian Fraternal Workers, 24 June 1971, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁹ Rev. Horace Ryburn, "The Plan of Operation," 1971, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁴⁰ Rev. Horace Ryburn, Thailand Commission Letter, No. 72-6, 16 June 1972, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

The 1960s saw a decrease of financial contributions to UPC and it became increasingly apparent that COEMAR would be unable to sustain the rising costs of world mission. In 1970 the world mission budget was cut by 8 percent, and in 1971 by another 12 percent.⁴¹ The Commission was forced to reduce its world mission program. In the early 1970s the Commission appointed a number of deputations to visit the churches associated with UPC in order to discuss the financial situation with them. The deputation appointed to Thailand arrived in September 1971. The deputation met the officers of CCT and gave them the option of loosing funds designated for particular projects, or reducing American personnel. The church officers decided that they would prefer to loose personnel but were reluctant to decide which personnel to cut. Rev. William Yoder recalled: "They [the deputation] had finally come to the point where they had to put the officers of the church in a room and said, 'We are going to sit here until you tell us which missionaries stay and which missionaries go.'"⁴² Eventually the church officers selected eleven fraternal workers: Mr. and Mrs. Gerald P Dyck, Rev. and Mrs. Norman P Roadarmel, Rev. and Mrs. Clifford E. Chaffee, Rev. and Mrs. Francis Seely and Miss Jane Arp.⁴³ These were asked to leave, not because the church did not want them, but because the Commission could not afford to keep them. Three of those eleven, Rev. and Mrs. Francis Seely and Miss Jane Arp, successfully negotiated alternative means of financial support and were able to stay on in Thailand for several years.⁴⁴

f) The Realisation of an Independent Thai Church

⁴¹ Rev. Horace Ryburn to American Presbyterian Fraternal Workers, 17 December 1969, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; Rev. Horace Ryburn, Thailand Program Agency Letter, No. 73-4, 14 May 1973, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁴² Rev. William Yoder, interview by Patricia McLean, 17 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁴³ There are no minutes of this meeting in the archives. The details of who was asked to leave are recorded in subsequent Commission Letters: Thailand Commission Letter, No. 72-5, 2 May 1972, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; Thailand Commission Letter, No. 72-6, 16 June 1972, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; Thailand Commission Letter, No. 73-4 14 May 1973, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁴⁴ Thailand Commission Letter, No. 72-9, 5 October 1972, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

In 1976 Ryburn retired, the UPC office was closed and FWACs discontinued.⁴⁵ Rev. and Mrs. Frank Younkin were appointed to serve as assistants to the CCT General Secretary with responsibility for ecumenical affairs. The Younkins did not have as much influence in CCT as Ryburn. Although their official position within CCT was similar to his, they were unable and unwilling to influence the affairs of the church to the same extent. In particular they did not attend CCT committee meetings unless invited.⁴⁶ The Younkins served for two years until retirement in 1978 at which point Thai Christians were entirely responsible for the care of fraternal workers assigned to the CCT.⁴⁷

By 1980 the number of American Presbyterian fraternal workers in Thailand had been reduced to less than forty. Many of those who had held key positions within CCT had left. Hamlin retired from Thailand Theological Seminary in 1974. He recalled that it was “becoming less and less viable for me to be President of an institution as an expatriate.”⁴⁸ The wisdom of his decision was confirmed by the increasing presence of Thai Christians in the seminary after his departure. Hamlin remarked that after leaving Thailand “we saw students taking responsible positions which they would never have done while we were still here and they would never have opposed anything we said or did.”⁴⁹ Downs and McIlvride retired from the SCCs, Travaille from the Chiangrai Rural Project and Judd from the Rural Life Department. Kingshill retired from Payap University in 1988. As these leading American Presbyterians left and the overall number of American Presbyterians dropped, the influence of the American Presbyterian fraternal workers in CCT declined. Increasingly fraternal workers worked under Thai Christians and were responsible to Thai Christians. By 1996 there were only nineteen American Presbyterian fraternal workers in CCT.

⁴⁵ Prasit, *A History of the Church of Christ in Thailand*, 161.

⁴⁶ Rev. Francis Younkin, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

3. Part Two

A. The Relationship between the American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand

The war, 1939-1945, radically altered the world scene dividing the world in to two spheres of influence and triggering the onset of the cold war. IMC responded with a world conference on the theme: "Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World" at Whitby in 1947. It was agreed that churches around the world must stand together. The slogan: partnership in obedience." PCUSA were conversant with the ideal of partnership as it was being developed at Whitby and Willingen and were eager to implement those insights by establishing a more equal partnership with the national churches.

Before the war the relationship between APM in Thailand and CCT was one of an unequal partnership. Personnel and money flowed one-way and power resided firmly in the hands of the mission. APM thought in terms of nurturing the 'younger' church, CCT in terms of receiving from the 'older' church. The war brought an end to that partnership. American personnel were expelled from Thailand, American funds were unable to reach Thailand and the church assumed full responsibility for the work. Four years later the mission and the church were ready for a new relationship, a more equal partnership with one another. CCT invited APM to establish a partnership that allowed them to "retain freedom of action."⁵⁰ APM agreed that CCT "had gained a new spirit of independence" that would call "for a fresh consideration of the missionary's relation to the church."⁵¹ It decided that the mission could only be re-established in consultation with the church and with the aim of the mission being integrated into the church.

However, the vision of partnership delineated by IMC and adopted by PCUSA was primarily a Western innovation. The churches in the North still believed that they

⁵⁰ Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 162

⁵¹ Rev. J. L. Hooper to Siam Mission, Board Letter Number 425, 20 July 1945, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

knew what was best for the churches in the South and PCUSA was no exception. Ryburn was authorised to act on behalf of BFM in Thailand, to close the mission and integrate the missionaries into the Thai church. Thai Christians were encouraged to be involved in that process but were not allowed to radically challenge the process itself. American Presbyterian missionaries were expected to offer their unwavering support. In the process of implementing that policy Ryburn met resistance from both American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians.

An inadequate understanding of the integration process fuelled the missionaries' discontent. The vision was neither adequately communicated to, nor shared by, the body of American Presbyterians arriving in Thailand after the war. Dr. John Smith, a member of BFM, wrote to Ryburn lamenting: "One of our greatest failures since the war has been the failure to share with our missionaries our philosophy of mission concerning the place of leadership of the younger churches."⁵² Consequently there were a significant number of American Presbyterians who resisted the integration process. Some believed that the mission should maintain its independence and expressed the mission's relationship with the church in terms of patronage rather than partnership. Others espoused a belief in an independent church but felt that the CCT was not yet ready, or able, to attain its independence, insisting that the mission was better equipped to manage the church. During the 1950s they demonstrated a reluctance to relinquish control of the mission/church work to Thai Christians and an unwillingness to trust Thai Christians to resume responsibility. For example, they opposed the decision to hand over the budget for evangelism to the church in 1950 fearing that the church would not use the money for evangelism.⁵³ These difficulties occurred despite the Commission's decision to "recruit and train personnel who could appreciate the new dynamics of this changing world, who were willing to work under Asian or African administrators, and who could live through change."⁵⁴

⁵² Rev. John Coventry Smith to Rev. Horace Ryburn, 12 November 1951, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁵³ Rev. Horace Ryburn, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

⁵⁴ Black, *Merging Mission and Unity*, 38. See also Stanley W. Rycroft, *The Ecumenical Witness of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States*, 223-227

Even after the American Presbyterians has been formally integrated into CCT, in 1957, there were those who continued to oppose the integration process. In particular they resisted the transition from mission-only-community to church, insisting that it was necessary for fraternal workers to meet together without Thai Christians in order to discuss the work of the church and to “to develop a sense of missionary comradeship.”⁵⁵ The American Presbyterians’ insistence on mission-only-meetings was a “keen disappointment” to Ryburn.⁵⁶ He argued that the fraternal workers should turn to the church and not fellow fraternal workers for the pastoral support they sought, stating: “All the spiritual and intellectual resources of the CCT are at our disposal to help us meet the challenges that come to us as fraternal workers.”⁵⁷ Despite Ryburn’s endorsement of CCT and recommendation that fraternal workers integrate themselves more fully into CCT some Presbyterians still felt unable to make the adjustment from an American Christian community to a predominately Thai Christian community. The English speaking International Churches in Bangkok and Chiangmai developed to meet the felt needs of those fraternal workers.

Fraternal workers in Thailand were not alone in their struggle to adjust to the new mission-church structure. COEMAR were aware of the particular pastoral problems associated with mission-church integration and initiated two consultations to address these. The consultations recommended that the Commission Representatives coordinate interim support structures to meet the pastoral needs of fraternal workers until the churches established their own.⁵⁸ The difficulties in Thailand, however, were accentuated by the fact that Ryburn, the Commission Representative, was opposed to any committee or conference that perpetuated the traditional mission structure. Francis W Prichard, who served as Personnel Consultant for Asia for the Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations of UPC, remarked that Ryburn gave the integration process a more radical interpretation than Commission

⁵⁵ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Mission, 22-29 June 1954, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁵⁶ Rev. Horace Ryburn to Rev. Mateo F Occena, 5 January 1955, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁵⁷ Rev. Horace Ryburn to All American Presbyterian Fraternal Workers in Thailand, 21 October 1971, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁵⁸ Black, *Merging Mission and Unity*, 96-97.

Representatives elsewhere, and that this resulted in fraternal workers in Thailand experiencing a sense of isolation and dislocation more marked than fraternal workers in other countries.⁵⁹

The implementation of PCUSA's vision of mission-church relations also met resistance from Thai Christians. After the formal termination of APM American Presbyterian fraternal workers continued to have a significant influence in CCT. They were well educated, highly motivated and ambitious and quickly secured positions of authority in the Thai church. Their prestige was enhanced by their nationality and by the significant financial contributions they brought with them, as a group and as individuals.⁶⁰ Thai Christians, also well educated, highly motivated and ambitious, were unable to compete. Some disliked the ongoing influence of American Christians in the Thai church, were angered by the Thai church's dependence on the American church, and frustrated by CCT's unwillingness to recognise them and secure their own promotion within CCT. Rev. Dr. Amnuay Tapingkae contended: "Young leaders are more or less treated as half baked beans. Their voices are sounds, which are heard but not listened to. They are admired for their academic achievements and their command of English, but not sincerely and wholly trusted."⁶¹

A group of young Thai graduates formed an association that became known as the 'Young Turks.' They started a journal called *Kit*, which means 'to think.' Rev. Puang Akkapiin, previous Moderator of CCT, and Dr. Maen Pongudom, lecturer at the Thailand Theological Seminary, were active members of the association. Through their writing and teaching they challenged the status quo. They argued that the formal integration of 1957 had reinforced the power of the American Presbyterians, in particular Ryburn, and not the Thai church, and accused Ryburn of acting as 'archbishop of the CCT.'⁶² The thinking of the Young Turks reflects that of many

⁵⁹ Rev. Francis Prichard, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

⁶⁰ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁶¹ Rev. Dr. Amnuay Tapingkae to Dr. Ray Downs, 30 May 1962, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁶² Maen Pongudom, "The Archbishop of the CCT," *Kit* 3 (1966), 7.

non-Western Christians at that time and was vocalised at the CWME conference in Bangkok in 1973.⁶³

The Young Turks were opposed by more senior Thai Christians and American Presbyterians. Dr. Maen was called to the CCT office in Bangkok and asked to sign a statement pledging to discontinue his critique of the church and the mission.⁶⁴ Ryburn denied the accusations made against him. In one correspondence he argued that the role of the Commission Representative “is solely liaison, nothing more” and that the Presbyterians “are not, in anyway, attempting to influence or control the church through these persons or through the relationship itself.”⁶⁵ From this it may be inferred that members of both UPC and CCT had a vested interest in protecting the patron-client relationship between the two churches.

Shortly after this Ryburn initiated an intensification of the integration process that resulted in the ‘Plan of Operation.’ It is unlikely that Ryburn’s decision to do so was significantly influenced by the Young Turks or represented a response to their critique. Ryburn had vigorously pursued the vision of partnership throughout his post-war career irrespective of alternative opinions. The ‘Plan of Operation’ was the final stage of the vision. It was inspired by those in America not Thailand, by those who were increasingly forced to recognise that the “integration process in some ways was more of a Western domination of the church than the old mission structures” and were searching for means by which to establish more equitable relationships between North and South.⁶⁶ It was not, however, the ‘Plan of Operation,’ the closing of the UPC office or the end of the Commission Representative, that brought about the desired partnership between UPC and CCT, but rather the departure of Ryburn, and

⁶³ *Bangkok Assembly 1973: Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 31 December 1972 and 9-12 January 1973* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, n.d.), 116-117.

⁶⁴ Dr. Maen Pongudom, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁶⁵ Rev. Horace Ryburn to the Church Officers of the Church of Christ in Thailand, 26 November 1974, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁶⁶ Black, *Merging Mission and Unity*, 94.

other influential American Presbyterians, and the significant reduction in American funds. Their departure and the cut in financial subsidies radically altered the relationship between Americans and Thais in CCT. Janet Guyer, a daughter of American Presbyterian missionaries and American Presbyterian fraternal worker in CCT, contended that by the 1990s a real shift in power had occurred. Previously American Presbyterians could have influenced church affairs if they had wanted, now they could not.⁶⁷ Rev. Herbert Swanson explained that now fraternal workers “have to work within a structure, cannot be a head, cannot decide how a project is going to be run and have no control over work budgets.”⁶⁸ He remarked that few missions or churches have been willing to make that kind of sacrifice.

Interestingly, the decreasing influence of the American Presbyterians has made it possible for the Thai church to appoint foreigners to positions of authority in CCT without being concerned that they would exert an inappropriate influence over the affairs of the church or institutions of the church. In 1986 Dr. John Guyer was appointed as Medical Director at McCormick Hospital in Chiangmai. The same year the church officers asked Yoder to serve as Dean of the Faculty of Theology of Payap University. Although the Program Agency contested Yoder’s appointment, contending that it was inappropriate to appoint foreign personnel to positions of authority in the Thai church, CCT insisted on his promotion and he continued to serve as Dean into the 1990s. Collins, lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of Payap University, suggested that while there is still an ongoing patron-client relationship between foreign workers and Thai Christians, CCT has now reached a point of maturity where “they are able to say, ‘OK here is a Westerner who we like, who communicates well with us, so they can do that for while.’”⁶⁹ Thai Christians interviewed expressed an appreciation for the missionaries, their relationship with and contribution to the Thai church, while at the same time recognising the missionaries’ ongoing role as patrons in the Thai church. Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit remarked that, “People still expect the missionaries to bring them

⁶⁷ Rev. Janet Guyer, interview by Patricia McLean, 17 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁶⁸ Rev. Herbert Swanson, interview by Patricia McLean, 27 May 1999, Bangkok, tape recording.

⁶⁹ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

something, money or an education. They still expect something from them.”⁷⁰ Dr. John Mark Thomthai, a government official and lecturer at Chulalongkorn University, insisted that the relationship between missionaries and Thai Christians never starts on an equal footing. He compared it to the relationship between a teacher and student, commenting: “It takes a long time to develop an equal relationship, of course it happens, but I sense it is not easy.”⁷¹

B. The American Presbyterians’ and the Church of Christ in Thailand’s Approach to Evangelism

The American Presbyterian missionaries who returned to Thailand immediately after the war all spoke Thai, had a good understanding of Thai culture and had established relationships with the Thai church and Thai Christians. They were also developing a deep respect for the Thai church that was provoked by an awareness of the church’s fortitude through four years of enforced isolation, adversity and persecution. The initial group of missionaries returning to Thailand after the war were asked to renew relationships, reclaim property, distribute aid and evangelise. BFM and the American Presbyterian missionaries believed that evangelism was a priority. However, there was no clear policy on evangelism and “every missionary – under the pressure and the urgency of the evangelistic opportunities present everywhere after the war – did what was necessary to gather in the harvest of souls for Christ.”⁷²

At the Planning Conference in November 1946 APM and CCT discussed current evangelistic practices and agreed on a number of ways by which they could be improved: schools and hospitals would be assessed to ascertain how they might serve the evangelistic enterprise more effectively, every hospital would be encouraged to employ an evangelist and evangelists would receive training at McGilvary Theological Seminary.⁷³ Dr. William Blair, a member of the deputation from the

⁷⁰ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean, 22 April 1999, Chiangmai.

⁷¹ Dr. John Mark Thomthai, interview by Patricia McLean, 15 March 1999, Chiangmai.

⁷² Rev. Albert Seigle, Report of the Joint Advisory Committee for Evangelism (report presented at the American Presbyterian Meeting, 26-29 April 1948), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁷³ Minutes of the Planning Conference, 11-16 November 1946, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

BFM, contended that at a time when evangelism is frowned upon as an “unwarranted interference in the affairs of others... we must be willing to be called proselytisers.”⁷⁴ The conference set up a national committee on evangelism to oversee the mission-church evangelistic enterprise.

After the conference Rev. John Eakin ran a three month training course for evangelists, January to March 1947. At the end of each month the students went out for a week of intense evangelism visiting schools, hospitals and churches. Rev. Puang Akkapin, Moderator of CCT, and Rev. Tongkham Pantupongse, a member of the Executive Committee of CCT started conducting seven day evangelistic campaigns in different areas of Thailand accompanied by teams of Thai Christians.⁷⁵ These campaigns continued for ten years. Between 1947-1951 the church grew by 14 percent from 11,756 members in seventy-two churches to 13,422 members in ninety-three churches.⁷⁶

APM's contribution to the evangelistic enterprise was surprisingly limited. Thai Christians were the primary evangelists. Rev. Akkapin insisted that the Thai church did not need foreign missionaries to evangelise because “the church has the ability to do this work already.”⁷⁷ In 1950 the mission asked the church to take full responsibility for the mission's budget for evangelism. In September 1956 the Joint Advisory Committee on Evangelism, established at the planning conference in 1946, was replaced by the CCT Evangelism Committee and all members of that new committee were elected by the church. The Evangelism Committee was responsible for CCT's evangelistic enterprise. Members visited CCT churches and trained local Christians how to evangelise their own community. They organised intensive

⁷⁴ Dr. William N. Blair, “Our Unchanging Purpose” (paper presented at the Conference of Group ‘A’ Missionaries, 19-21 November 1945), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁷⁵ Rev. Albert Seigle, Report of the Joint Advisory Committee for Evangelism (report presented at the American Presbyterian Meeting, 26-29 April 1948), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁷⁶ Wells, *History of Protestant Work*, 190.

⁷⁷ Rev. Puang Akkapin in Rev. Herbert Grether, Report on the Reopening of McGilvary Theological Seminary, 1949, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

evangelistic campaigns in CCT schools, which were known as 'Religious Emphasis Weeks.' They encouraged Christian teachers to attend short courses at the seminary and lobbied CCT schools and hospitals to employ trained, full-time, evangelists and chaplains.

In 1967 Rev. Tongkham was appointed as the first Director of the Department of Evangelism in CCT having served as chair of the Evangelism Committee since 1963.⁷⁸ He organised the first nation-wide seminar on evangelism and invited every mission and church working in Thailand to send a representative. Ninety attended the conference and discussed the nature of evangelism, reviewing past evangelistic practices and thrashing out what the church in Thailand should be doing in order to effectively evangelise in the future.⁷⁹ Isaac Scott, the OMF representative attending the conference, remarked that most of those present at the conference were Thai Christians with significant experience in evangelism in Thailand and that "most of the comments and discussion came from them."⁸⁰ This report confirms the contention that Thai Christians in CCT in general, and the Evangelism Committee in particular, were the principal evangelists in CCT, not foreign personnel.

Thai Christians in CCT believed that Christian evangelism should be explicit and overt.⁸¹ Thai Buddhists should be called to convert from Thai Buddhism to Christianity. Some American Presbyterians in Thailand were uncomfortable with this style of evangelism. They preferred a more holistic approach and understood evangelism to be an inherent aspect of their service in Thailand, whether involved in medicine, education or rural development. The relationship between evangelism and social action was becoming an increasingly controversial matter within the ecumenical movement and the discourse in Thailand reflects the wider debate within

⁷⁸ See: Virat Koydul, *The History and Growth of the Church of Christ in Thailand: An Evangelistic Perspective* (MTh, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990), 70-77.

⁷⁹ Isaac Scott, Report on the National Seminar on Evangelism (report presented at Field Council, 14-17 September 1964), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Koydul, *History and Growth of the Church of Christ in Thailand*, 64-77.

WCC. In 1960 Rev. Mateo F Occena, Secretary of the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia for COEMAR, recommended that the Commission appoint one or two fraternal workers for full-time evangelism in Thailand. Occena's suggestion was rejected by the American Presbyterians in Thailand, Ryburn pointing out that the church and not the Commission was responsible for evangelism. Downs wrote to Occena contending that he was wrongly separating evangelism off as something separate from and unrelated to medical and educational work.⁸²

The American Presbyterians' understanding of evangelism was also influenced by their attitude towards Thai Buddhist culture. Their growing interest in Thai Buddhist culture meant that they were less willing to condemn and more interested in incorporating aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in Christian evangelism and within the Thai church. The seminary was the principal locus for theological initiative. John Hamlin recruited faculty members who were able and willing to explore ways in which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture could be integrated into Thai Christianity.⁸³ Thai students were encouraged to explore ways in which Thai drama, music and dance could be used in evangelism and worship. A drama group was set up at the seminary. This group was committed to presenting Biblical narratives in a comprehensible and memorable form. It travelled around the country visiting churches and supporting evangelistic outreaches. Frances Hamlin, who was actively involved in the seminary, contended that Thai art forms provided "a medium for the church to speak to the culture and life of this land."⁸⁴ She argued that drama in particular provided "a medium for experimentation in the use of Thai art forms which would not be acceptable elsewhere in Thai Christian circles, as yet."⁸⁵ Dr. Maen, who was a student of John Hamlin's in the early 1960s, reflected that Hamlin encouraged his students "to think in Thai ways and opened the door for students to think for themselves."⁸⁶

⁸² Dr. Ray Downs to Rev. Mateo F Occena, 1 December 1960, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁸³ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Patricia McLean, 15 December 1999, by phone.

⁸⁴ Mrs. E. J. Hamlin to Dr. J. F. Williamson, 19 December 1960, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Dr. Maen Pongudom, interview by Patricia McLean.

Hamlin's influence extended beyond the seminary into the local churches which he encouraged to develop practices that were more in keeping with Thai society. John Hamlin recalled,

We tried to help local parish officers to take advantage of their own culture rather than be copiers of the city; take off their shoes when they go into the church, we tried to develop something for elders to wear in the church, Thai dress, and we tried to use sticky rice and coconut milk for the sacraments.⁸⁷

American Presbyterians were united in their affirmation of Thai Buddhist culture. However, the question of what approach should be taken towards Thai Buddhism was more controversial. Rev. Francis Seely, who worked in Thailand between 1946-1978, was a key advocate of an alternative approach to Thai Buddhism developing a Christian approach to other faiths similar to that found in the WCC's: 'Guidelines on Dialogue' (1979).⁸⁸ By 1960 Seely had begun to question the necessity of Christian evangelism and conversion from Buddhism to Christianity.⁸⁹ Seely advocated creative contact with, rather than ministry to, Thai Buddhists. Seely's views were not shared by many at the seminary or in the church but his presence presented a significant challenge to Thai Christians and foreign missionaries. Seely retired in 1978 but was succeeded in 1984 by Dr. John Butt, who shared a similar theological position. Butt taught at the seminary and negotiated the opening of the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture by Payap University in 1998, thus reinforcing the existence of an alternative theological position in CCT. Butt used the terms 'evangelism' and 'conversion' but radically redefined them. He understood conversion to refer to the act of turning towards God within any religious community rather than the transition from one religious community to another religious community.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Rev. Herbert Swanson.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Two: 4. B. 2., "The Christian Response to Other Faiths."

⁸⁹ Rev. Francis Seely, "A Preliminary Draft of a Statement to the Presbytery," November 1957, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹⁰ Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean, 21 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording. The American Presbyterian's approach to Thai Buddhism will be explored more fully in Chapter Five.

It is clear that the Department of Evangelism of CCT and the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture of Payap University espoused different understandings of Thai Buddhism and advocated different approaches toward Thai Buddhists. However, the evidence suggests that, despite these differences of opinion, the religious discourse generated by Seely and Butt did influence the practice of evangelism in CCT. By 1998 the Department of Evangelism had begun to invite Thai Buddhists into the churches, schools and hospitals to teach Thai Christians about Buddhism, believing that this would help Christians to understand their own faith better and help them to build stronger relationships with their neighbours. Christians and Buddhists employed in CCT schools and hospitals were invited to training sessions by the department, which encouraged Christians and Buddhists to work together in CCT institutions. Christian evangelists in churches, schools and hospitals were expected to have a good understanding of both Christianity and Buddhism.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of APM and CCT in Thailand between 1946-1998 reveals that the American Presbyterians moved toward the goal of an equal partnership with Thai Christians throughout the twentieth century. APM's pre-war relationship with CCT was characterised by domination and dependence, inequality rather than equality. However, the experiences of the Second World War radically challenged preconceived ideas about mission, church and the mission-church relations. BFM's response to the post-war situation was greatly influenced by ecumenical thinking, particularly as expressed by the world-wide missionary conferences of IMC and later CWME. The idea of partnership, initially proposed at Whitby in 1947, influenced BFM's world-wide policy toward mission, resulting in the decision to integrate American Presbyterian missions into associated churches and establish an equal partnership between PCUSA and those churches. The American Presbyterians returned to Thailand after the war fully intending to implement that policy, to integrate APM into CCT and to promote an equal partnership between PCUSA and CCT.

However, it proved extremely difficult to move from an unequal to an equal partnership. A long established patron-client relationship existed between APM and CCT, reinforced by a complex network of patron-client relationships between individual American Presbyterians and Thai Christians, and neither party was willing to jeopardise that. APM enjoyed the power and prestige associated with acting as patron, CCT the material benefits as client. The on-going patron-client relationship between APM and CCT perpetuated the unequal partnership between PCUSA and CCT. An equal partnership only became a reality after the patrons, powerful American Presbyterians, left Thailand. Their departure resulted in the empowerment of Thai Christians and permitted a more equitable relationship between the UPC and CCT.

PCUSA's decision to recognise the churches it had planted as equal partners in mission challenged its previously ambiguous attitude toward non-Western culture and implied a more positive appraisal of those cultures. In Thailand American Presbyterians showed an unprecedented interest in studying Thai Buddhist culture, and utilising aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in the church. However, although American Presbyterians were united in their acceptance and affirmation of Thai Buddhist culture they did not agree on the appropriate approach to Thai Buddhism. Their differing approaches to Thai Buddhism will be explored in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: The Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the Associated Churches in Thailand - Central: 1951-1998

1. Introduction

This chapter continues the analysis of OMF that begun with a review of CIM in Chapter Two. It is divided into two parts. The first part offers a concise history of OMF in Central Thailand and the Associated Churches in Thailand – Central. The second part consists of a more detailed exploration of OMF's approach to evangelism and its relationship with the churches it planted in Central Thailand. The chapter will argue that OMF's indigenous principles, inherited from CIM, were not successfully transferred to its work in Thailand, with the result that OMF missionaries played an over-dominant role in the development of the churches they founded. The chapter will postulate that this change in policy was encouraged, and justified in the view of OMF missionaries, by the missionaries' denigration of Thai Buddhist culture and ability of Thai Christians to exercise leadership. The chapter will suggest that OMF missionaries' theology predisposed the missionaries to a negative assessment of Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Christianity.

2. Part One

A. A Concise History of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the Associated Churches in Thailand - Central: 1951-1998

1. From China to Thailand

CIM was forced to withdraw from China in 1951. CIM Directors met to discuss the future of the mission, first at Kalmora, Australia, on 12 February 1951, then at Bournemouth in November 1951. Convinced of the unique significance of CIM, the Directors decided that the mission should extend its endeavours beyond the borders of China to other areas of Southeast Asia. CIM was renamed the Overseas

Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and the mission's international headquarters were relocated in Singapore.

CIM had been exclusively committed to China and the Chinese. After withdrawing from China they continued to prioritise the evangelisation of the Chinese. Thailand was considered to be a potential mission field because of the significant number of ethnic Chinese resident in Thailand including a number of hill tribes that had migrated south into Thailand. On 4 June 1951 Laurie C. Wood and G. H. Aldis began a two month national survey of Thailand. In consultation with the other Protestant missions working in Thailand an informal comity agreement was ratified. According to this agreement OMF was at liberty to work amongst the hill tribes in North Thailand, the Muslims in South Thailand, and the Thai and Chinese in thirteen provinces of Central Thailand.¹ OMF regarded these as three distinct missionary fields. A Field Superintendent was appointed to each and a Field Council elected. Cyril Faulkner was designated as Field Superintendent in Central Thailand. In addition a Field Medical Superintendent was appointed to Central Thailand in the person of Dr. Chris Maddox. The Field Medical Superintendent functioned without an associated Field Medical Council until 1969. Annual Field Conferences were held at which all missionaries were encouraged to participate in the mission's decision making processes. A Church Planters' Committee was established in 1971 in addition to the Field Council in Central Thailand.² This committee gave rise to Church Planters' Forums and a Church Workers' Committee in 1978 and the Church Workers Council in 1982.

¹ The American Presbyterians appealed with OMF to work with APM/CCT. When they declined APM permitted OMF to work in the central provinces, an area which APM had hitherto considered their own. See: Horace Ryburn, Thailand, to Dr. Frank Houghton, 3 September 1951, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; Dr. Frank Houghton to Horace Ryburn, Thailand, 8 September 1951, APM, PUA, Chiangmai and Horace Ryburn, Thailand, to Rowland Butler, Singapore, 30 April 1952, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

² Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 16-18 November 1971, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

The Field Superintendents were responsible to the OMF Directors in Singapore until 1972 when an Area Director was appointed to Thailand. The three mission fields functioned independently of one another until 1989. In 1989 OMF's work was reorganised. Mission work with the Thai, in North, South and Central Thailand, was coordinated under a Thai Church Planting Superintendent. Mission work with Muslims was organised under a Muslim Church Planting Superintendent, and mission work with the hill tribes under a North Thailand Superintendent. By this time the initial comity agreement had broken down and OMF had started working in both Chiangmai and Bangkok, previously American Presbyterian areas of work.

2. OMF Policy: The Relationship between Mission and Church

OMF policy is articulated in the Principles and Practice of the mission. This was first drafted on the *Lammermuir* in 1867. In 1875 it became the authoritative statement on the mission's policy. This document was revised in accordance with current CIM thinking in 1914, 1928, 1943 and 1955. OMF's indigenous principles, described in the Principles and Practice, expressed the mission's understanding of the relationship between mission and church. CIM believed that mission and church were independent organisations with distinct objectives. Influenced by their experiences in China, they insisted that the national church should maintain its independence from foreign missions. They believed that from the point of conversion national Christians should be trusted to work alongside the missionary, to decide on their own type of church order and affiliation; and that as early as possible foreign missionaries should withdraw from the national church handing over full responsibility to the national Christians. In particular CIM was opposed to the use of foreign funds to subsidise the national church maintaining that this would have a negative effect on the developing national church. Although the mission's insistence on the financial independence of the national church was challenged at the 1951 Bournemouth conference, the Directors decided that there was no warrant for modifying the mission's indigenous principles.³

³ Minutes of the Overseas Council, 17 May 1955, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

The principles were not readily implemented in Central Thailand where there were few Thai Christians and no established Thai church with which the OMF was willing to work. During the 1950s the principles were upheld. Field Conference discussed withdrawing missionaries from established churches, appointing Thai Christians to Field Council and replacing the annual missionary conference with a joint mission-church conference. By the 1960s the climate was changing. Many of those who had worked in China had retired. Church growth was remarkably slow and missionaries questioned whether this was the result of their unwillingness to offer leadership to the church. At Field Conference in 1960 the missionary community called for a re-evaluation of the missionary's relationship to the church. The conference stated that "a firmer leadership and more authoritative stand should be made by the missionaries, and that caution was necessary lest responsibility be handed over to the believers too soon."⁴

In 1970 OMF Directors in Singapore modified the mission's indigenous policy, allowing individual mission fields the freedom to decide whether or not to use mission funds to support national church workers. The issues were hotly debated in Central Thailand for eight years before the missionaries eventually voted in favour of a system of support at Field Conference in 1978. The manner in which Central Thailand Field Council managed the distribution of mission funds after that had a significant influence on mission-church relations, reinforcing the mission's increasing hegemony over the Thai church.

3. OMF Policy: The Relationship between existing Missions and Churches

CIM was one of the original members of the National Christian Council in China (NCCC), which was affiliated with WCC. CIM withdrew from NCCC after only three years for "doctrinal reasons".⁵ It believed that membership of NCCC necessitated an unacceptable theological compromise for the sake of institutional

⁴ Rose Dobles, Report on the annual Central Thailand Field Conference on 23-30 November 1960 for the Overseas Bulletin, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵ Minutes of the Overseas Council, 17 May 1955, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

unity. This decision was re-affirmed in 1955 when it considered membership of WCC. CIM/OMF's doctrinal position was reinforced by their political stance. Strongly opposed to Communism, they refused to cooperate with an organisation they considered to be sympathetic towards Communism. In 1958 the mission decided that it would be in the best interests of their work to remain free of affiliation with any international group, irrespective of its doctrinal viewpoint. Overseas Council reiterated this policy when reconsidering official association with WCC, ICCO, and WEF.

This policy prohibited OMF from affiliating with the national Protestant church in Thailand, CCT, or working more closely with the dominant Protestant mission in Thailand, APM. Beyond the benefits of a loose association with a mission already experienced in working in Thailand and with a developed national church, OMF was unwilling to consider a formal association with either mission or church. In 1956 OMF rejected the invitation to join the newly formed Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand. OMF's policy towards international Christian organisations was not modified until 1969 when the mission joined the reconstituted Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand. Its decision on this occasion was prompted by the government's requirement that all foreign missions either associate with an organisation already registered with the Ministry of Religion or register themselves with the Ministry of Religion.

4. OMF and ACTC Priorities: 1951-1998

By February 1952 there were nine OMF missionaries living in Bangkok committed to working in the thirteen provinces of Central Thailand allocated to OMF. In May 1952 Dorothy Beugler, Ruth Adams and May Campbell moved to Saraburi. In June 1952 Emerson and Grace Frey moved to Paknampho⁶. By the end of 1953 twenty-one OMF missionaries were resident in seven of the thirteen provinces: Paknampho, Saraburi, Lopburi, Chainat, Singburi, Uthai and Angthong. Two more missionaries worked on an evangelistic launch that toured the water-ways. In 1954 missionaries moved into Pichit. It was then agreed not to move missionaries into the other five

⁶ Paknampho town and province was later renamed Nakhon Sawan.

provinces in Central Thailand allocated to OMF, but to concentrate on the provinces where missionaries were already resident. The same year two general medical clinics were opened: one in Inburi in Singburi province, and one in Wiset, Angthong province. Leprosy clinics were started in Takli in Paknampho province, Uthai, Singburi and Chainat staffed by OMF missionaries who had taken a three week course at McKean Leprosy Hospital established by Dr. McKean in 1908 in Chiangmai.⁷ On 18 August 1956 Manorom Christian Hospital was opened in the district town of Manorom, Chainat province.⁸ In 1962 a leprosy wing was opened at the hospital. By then 2,000 leprosy patients were being treated by OMF missionaries and 500 were receiving prophylactic care from twenty-five clinics in the area. Inburi clinic was closed in 1960 and Wiset clinic in 1965. A general clinic was established further North in Nongbua, Paknampho province. This was developed into a hospital in 1968.

a) Tension between Medical Work and Church Work

OMF's priority was evangelism, not medical work. The principal objective was to convert Buddhists to Christianity and establish a church. However, it soon became apparent that medical work was the most effective means of evangelism and that those who were unwell, particularly those who were suffering with leprosy, were amongst the most responsive to Christianity. The mission responded by investing heavily in the medical work. The medical work grew rapidly, was well organised and attracted generous financial donations as well as trained personnel.

The expanding medical work in Central Thailand attracted ever-increasing criticism from the missionaries engaged in church work. Maddox, the Field Medical Superintendent, recalled: "There was criticism that we were expanding the hospital and medical work regardless of the needs of the rest of the mission. There was a lot of misunderstanding."⁹ Following a heated dispute at Field Conference in 1966 and unsuccessful attempts to redress the situation at Field Council and Overseas Council,

⁷ See Chapter Two: 2. B., "The Laos Mission."

⁸ See: Catherine Maddox, *Paddy Field Hospital* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962).

⁹ Dr. Chris Maddox, interview by Patricia McLean, 1 July 1998, Chiangmai, tape recording.

Maddox offered his letter of resignation. Initially this was rejected but in 1967 the OMF Directors asked Maddox to resign.¹⁰ Dr. Arthur Pennington was appointed to replace him.

Pennington recommended that OMF should agree on a policy that would set limits for the expansion of the medical work. Field Council appointed a sub-committee to review how far the two hospitals were meeting church planting objectives. The report gave voice to the sentiments of the church planters in Central Thailand, arguing that evangelism should take priority over medical work. The report stated that: "The preaching of the gospel cannot be coordinated with education, medical assistance or technical and social and economic aid as if the four were of equal value."¹¹ Although the initial report was rejected by the newly formed Field Medical Council, it was accepted in modified form later that year. A new church planting station was established at Manorom to encourage medics to participate in evangelism outside the hospital.

In 1973 Dr. Ray Windsor, Executive Director of the Bible and Missionary Fellowship, was invited by the OMF Directors in Singapore to conduct a review of the medical work in Thailand. Against the earlier internal report Windsor warned OMF not to expect mission hospitals to be directly church-planting in function.¹² OMF largely disregarded Windsor's report. They disagreed with Windsor's contention that it was necessary either to scale down/close the hospitals, hand the hospitals over to the government or establish a training institute.¹³ It was chronic

¹⁰ Dr. Chris Maddox, interview by Patricia McLean. Maddox's initial letter of resignation was reproduced in Cyril Faulkner to OMF missionaries in Central Thailand, 10 November 1967, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹ David Pickard, Rowland Bell, Dr. A. Gurtler, Report of the Sub-committee appointed by the Field Medical Committee, May 1972 (report presented at Central Thailand Field Medical Committee, May 1972), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹² Dr. Ray Windsor, "Ten Axioms of Medical Missionary Enterprise", 12 February 1973, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹³ Neville Long, Ray Cooling and Dr. John Townsend, Notes on a discussion of Dr. Ray Windsor's recommendations to OMF, Takli, 5 April 1973, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

staff shortages that eventually resulted in the decision to close Nongbua Christian Hospital and indigenise Manorom Christian Hospital. In the face of bitter opposition from both OMF missionaries and local Thai Christians and Buddhists, Nongbua Hospital was closed in 1983 and the property handed over to the government. Meanwhile Manorom began a protracted struggle to recruit and maintain senior Christian staff.

b) Changing Strategies

The number of missionaries working in Central Thailand continued to drop during the 1960s. By 1970 there were no resident missionaries in Angthong, Saraburi, Singburi and Pichit. Decreasing levels of personnel, combined with a substantial clinic schedule, meant that missionaries resident in the mission stations were hard pressed to do more than cover the leprosy clinics. Ian Roberts, a junior missionary in Lopburi during the 1970s, recalled: "The leprosy program dominated all of what was done in the southern four provinces... Not a lot of church work was being done and there was no one to do it."¹⁴ New missionaries were keen to diversify. In 1970 Alex Smith proposed the establishment of a Church Growth Committee. Although this was initially turned down, the committee was in place by the end of 1971. Known as the Church Planting Committee, it coordinated large-scale evangelistic campaigns during which many Thais made professions of faith in Christ. Thai Christian students were instrumental in this outreach.

While the evangelistic campaigns targeted the rural areas, Field Council was becoming increasingly concerned about the lack of evangelism in the towns and cities. Alan Bennett, Field Superintendent, argued that the mission's emphasis on the rural areas of Central Thailand had contributed to the weak state of the church, the rural churches being weak because they lacked gifted and trained leadership personnel and sufficient financial backing. He was convinced that an urban, rather than a rural church, would be able to provide both an economic base and leadership personnel. Field Council proceeded to draw up new objectives for OMF's work in Central Thailand. The aim was to establish a church in every district town of the

¹⁴ Ian Roberts, interview by Patricia McLean, 16 May 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

eight provinces where OMF was working by the year 2000. The objective was presented to Field Conference in 1977. Acceptance of this objective entailed a significant reorganisation both of the mission and the church. Village churches were asked to reconvene in the district towns, several rural churches creating one town church. Missionaries were discouraged from pursuing an itinerant ministry, visiting the scattered rural Christians and small rural churches, and were asked instead to pursue urban evangelism and contribute to the growth of the urban church. Many missionaries were critical of this policy. Although they realised that current mission practice was resulting in a scattered rural church and that their efforts were people rather than church orientated, they were concerned about the effect of the proposed change in policy on rural Christians. Rowland Bell, missionary with responsibility for the churches in Uthai province, wrote: "All the indications are that concentration rather than far flung effort is the right thing to do in the future." But he lamented: "It is very difficult to make the change over from one system to the other for we are dealing with people whom we have come to know well over the years."¹⁵

After the district plan was implemented in 1977 OMF missionaries and Thai Christians concentrated their work in the district towns. They continued to work in the district towns throughout the 1980s. Evangelistic efforts were directed towards the conversion of the emerging middle class in the towns. The beginning of OMF church planting work in Bangkok in 1975 reinforced the move towards urban based evangelism. However, decreasing missionary numbers and the increase in the number of district towns forced Field Council to reconsider the district town objective. In the early 1990s Field Council made the decision to concentrate its missionary efforts in the eight provincial towns and Bangkok rather than the multiple district towns in those eight provinces. Teams of missionaries were appointed to plant second churches in the provincial towns alongside the established first church. This policy proved controversial amongst both OMF missionaries and Thai Christians. Both missionaries and Thai Christians have expressed concern that the

¹⁵ Rowland Bell, Annual Report from Manorom Station, 30 September 1977 (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 6-11 November 1977), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

second church policy represents a rejection of the existing first church and creates unwarranted tension between the two churches. These fears have been realised in both Lopburi and Saraburi where missionaries are actively engaged in planting a second church.

c) The Emergence of the Association of Churches in Central Thailand

The response to the Gospel in Central Thailand was slow and during the 1950s only a handful of Thai converted from Buddhism to Christianity. Those with leprosy converted more readily than those the missionaries described as 'well' and soon there was a group of believers nearly every where that OMF had a leprosy clinic. The well and leprosy Christians met separately, the well Christians in the homes of the missionaries and the leprosy Christians in the leprosy clinic building, called a *sala*. The leprosy believers' church thus came to be known as the *sala* church, adopting the Thai name for the shelter where they gathered for clinics and church meetings.

(1) The Well Believers' Church

In December 1956 Field Council decided to hold a conference for the Christians in the Central provinces to discuss the appointment of a regional pastor for OMF-founded churches in Central Thailand, the establishment of a committee to coordinate the work of the churches, and a church constitution. Two conferences were held in April 1957. Forty gathered in Uthai for the Leprosy Believers' Conference, and forty in Manorom for the United Believers' Conference. At the United Believers' Conference six men were elected to coordinate the work of the church in Central Thailand. They formed the Central Committee. Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, the first Business Manager of Manorom Christian Hospital, was elected as chairman of this committee and one missionary was appointed as an advisor. Initially the emerging association of churches planted in Central Thailand by OMF was called the 'United Christian Churches of Central Thailand,' but this was subsequently changed to the 'Association of Churches in Central Thailand.'¹⁶

¹⁶ Cyril Faulkner to OMF missionaries in Central Thailand, 22 May 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok. OMF was reluctant to establish a denomination in Central Thailand and therefore resisted referring to the OMF-planted churches as an association for many years despite the relatively early decision to call the OMF-planted churches the Association of Churches in Central

At Field Conference in 1958 the relationship between the Central Committee and the local churches was discussed at length. Different opinions were expressed. Some members of Field Council considered the local church to be sacrosanct and were critical of the Central Committee's "tendency to legislate for the smaller groups."¹⁷ Others were willing for the Central Committee to play a more active role in the developing Association of Churches in Central Thailand. Eventually it was concluded that the relationship was one of "fellowship only."¹⁸ However, different opinions on these issues prevented Field Council from drawing up a constitution for the church. On 7 March 1961 Faulkner appealed to Singapore for help.¹⁹ Arnold J. Lea, General Director of OMF, travelled to Thailand to meet with Field Council. He advised the council to settle on one form of church government. He insisted that missionary guidance at this stage was necessary and should not prevent the Thai church making their own decisions about church government later. Eventually the council agreed that the church in Central Thailand should be encouraged to develop as a loose association of independent local churches. They agreed to draw up two constitutions, one for the local church and one for the Association of Churches in Central Thailand.²⁰

Disagreement then arose over when to present these constitutions to the Thai church. On 3 February 1962 the Central Committee was informed that the constitution for the local church would shortly be available, but advised that "it would be better as the

Thailand. The name the Associated Churches in Thailand – Central (ACT-C) was not introduced until the national association of OMF-planted churches was established in June 1985. The original name the Association of Churches in Central Thailand was never formally abbreviated to ACT.

¹⁷ Cyril Faulkner, Central Thailand, to Arnold J. Lea, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore, 25 July 1960, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 26 November to 2 December 1958, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹⁹ Cyril Faulkner, Central Thailand, to Arnold J. Lea, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore, 7 March 1961, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

²⁰ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 30-31 March 1961, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

groups were at present, to go along little by little in a more informal way.”²¹ On 16 February 1962 Field Council met to discuss the constitution for the Association of Churches in Central Thailand. Some wanted this constitution put to the Central Committee immediately and felt it was dishonest to withhold it; some were fearful that if that were done it would be accepted without any real examination; others felt the churches already related well and should be left as an informal organisation. Eventually they agreed not to submit the constitution to the Central Committee but to disseminate the principles embodied in the constitution.²² Eventually on 8 September 1962 the constitution for the Association of Churches in Central Thailand was offered to the Central Committee. However, Field Council told the Central Committee that they did not consider the Central Committee mature enough to adopt the constitution at present and did not expect the Central Committee to adopt the constitution for several years.²³

(2) The Merger of the Well Believers' Church and the Leprosy Believers' Church

The leprosy believers' or *sala* church developed independently of the well believers' church. In April 1958, at the annual Leprosy Believers' Conference, a committee was elected to coordinate the work of the *sala* churches. Initially Pastor Arphon, chairman of the Central Committee, acted as the committee's advisor. In February 1962 Field Council stated that they were happy for Pastor Arphon to continue as advisor to the *sala* church.²⁴ In 1959 Field Conference discussed the possible merger of the *sala* and well churches and decided against it. It was concerned that an influx

²¹ Report on the Central Thailand Church Committee for Central Thailand Field Council, 3 February 1962 (report presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 19-23 February 1962), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²² Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 19-23 February 1962, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²³ Report on the Central Thailand Church Committee for Central Thailand Field Council, 8 September 1962 (report presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 26 November 1962), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²⁴ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 19-23 February 1962, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok. There are no written reports from the *sala* church committee and no indication that they received the church constitutions.

of leprosy Christians would have a negative affect on the well church, reinforcing the association of leprosy and Christianity and discouraging Thai Buddhists from converting to Christianity.²⁵ With the advent of more effective health care for those with leprosy Field Council was willing to consider a closer relationship between the *sala* and well churches. In November 1971 Field Council suggested that the well and *sala* churches should meet irregularly for times of fellowship with a view to eventual merger.²⁶ However, despite increasing fellowship between the two churches, there was ongoing opposition to a merger from both the well and *sala* churches. It was not until May 1977 that both the well and *sala* churches voted to combine committees.²⁷ The first combined well and *sala* conference held in February 1978 was a critical turning point for the Association of Churches in Central Thailand. It marked the uniting of two previously independent OMF-planted groups of churches in Central Thailand.

The combined well and *sala* churches divided naturally into four regions; Nakhon Sawan and Pichit in the North, Uthai in the West, Chainat in the East and Angthong, Singburi, Saraburi and Lopburi in the South. Regional committees were formed to direct the work of the church in those areas. The Central Committee was made up of two members from each regional committee and two OMF advisors.

d) A National Association of Churches

During the 1980s OMF's traditional antipathy towards denominations was superseded by a desire to see the various regional associations of churches planted by OMF in Thailand firmly established amidst a plethora of indigenous churches, missionary planted churches and missionary organisations. To this end OMF proposed that a national association of OMF-planted churches be established, comprising the regional associations of churches planted by OMF in North, South

²⁵ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 25 November to 3 December 1959, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²⁶ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 16-18 November 1971, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²⁷ Alan Bennett to OMF missionaries in Central Thailand, 1 March 1977, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

and Central Thailand. Ian Roberts, Field Superintendent, argued that a national association would give “local groups a sense of belonging to, and having fellowship with, a wider body” as well as a “standing and recognition when others are wanting to attract them into other organisations.”²⁸

In August 1982 OMF drafted a constitution for a proposed national association of regional associations of churches. The Association of Churches in Central Thailand was initially not in favour of the formation of a national association.²⁹ It was not until 10 December 1983 that the Association of Churches in Central Thailand agreed, in principle, to a national association.³⁰ In June 1985 the regional associations formally constituted a national association.³¹ OMF Thailand appointed a committee to preside over the development of the national Associated Churches in Thailand (ACT). No Thai Christians were invited to join the committee. Asked how far ACT was a western missionary innovation, Roberts replied: “Definitely we westerners have had a significant input into it. To what extent it would have happened if OMF had not pushed it, I don’t know.”³²

3. Part Two

A. The Overseas Missionary Fellowships’ and the Associated Churches in Thailand’s Approach to Evangelism

OMF missionaries relocated from China were disappointed to discover that the Chinese in Central Thailand spoke a different Chinese dialect than the one they knew. Instead of working with the Chinese, as they had hoped, they were persuaded to begin work with the Thai. They began to learn the Thai language but progress was slow because little time was set aside for language study and instruction materials were inadequate. The primary objective was to convert Thai Buddhists to

²⁸ Ian Roberts, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 2-7 November 1983), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

²⁹ Minutes of the Thailand Area Council, 16 November 1983, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³⁰ Minutes of the Thailand Area Council, 8 February 1984, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³¹ Minutes of the Church Workers Council, 5 January 1985, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³² Ian Roberts, interview with Patricia McLean.

Christianity and OMF missionaries were only interested in acquiring a grasp of the language and culture of Thailand so far as it enabled them to achieve that objective. Their prioritisation of evangelism over social action, and their narrow definition of evangelism as the explicit communication of the Gospel, reflects the thinking of the evangelical movement that was later articulated in the *Lausanne Covenant*.

OMF missionaries arriving in Central Thailand during the 1950s believed that no one had the right to hear the Gospel twice before everyone had heard the Gospel once.³³ They were confident that a brief presentation of the Gospel enabled a Thai Buddhist to make an informed decision for or against Christ.³⁴ Church planting missionaries, posted in the provincial towns, toured the surrounding towns and villages preaching and handing out tracts. Bell recalled, “we set off to distribute scriptures from the southern boundary of Saraburi up to the northern boundary.”³⁵ Medical missionaries offered both medical assistance and the Gospel in the clinics and hospital. An awareness of the missionaries and the Gospel spread rapidly through the mission’s medical work. While church planting missionaries were discouraged by their apparent lack of success, medical missionaries were delighted by their evident success. In a short time OMF’s work in Central Thailand was dominated by the medical work. In particular the number of leprosy clinics increased rapidly. Church planting missionaries were requested to support the medical evangelism by offering assistance in the leprosy clinics, general clinics and hospital. They were also responsible for visiting those who had shown an interest in the Gospel at the clinics and hospital and pastoring the small groups of believers that came into being through the medical work.

Medical work contributed to the missionaries’ alienation from Thai Buddhist culture. Medical missionaries were able to make a significant contribution to relieving suffering without acquiring an adequate grasp of the Thai language or Thai culture.

³³ Rowland Bell, interview with Patricia McLean, 8 June 1998, Edinburgh, tape recording.

³⁴ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³⁵ Rowland Bell, interview with Patricia McLean.

Maddox recalled: "It was more or less said that I shouldn't bother too much with the language, I never had a proper language course."³⁶ He later wrote to Lea complaining:

Language problems are an infuriating frustration for everyone: I am daily annoyed and embarrassed by my inability to converse with visitors and staff, not knowing what is being said in daily prayers, not taking my part in them, not over-hearing or knowing what is going on in the place.³⁷

By the close of the 1950s an initial optimism about the growth of the church in Central Thailand had waned. OMF missionaries were becoming aware that Thai Buddhists did not readily convert to Christianity. Those who did convert frequently reverted to Buddhism. A period of self-doubt set in. Church planting missionaries grew ever more critical of the mission's emphasis on medical work. They insisted that medical work absorbed a disproportionate quantity of mission funds and personnel. They disagreed with the medical workers practice of recruiting Thai Christians to work in the clinics and hospital, arguing that the practice removed key Thai converts from the surrounding provinces and exacerbated the slow growth of the church.

During this period of discontent, missionaries became aware of the Pentecostal movement. Many began to consider the possibility that it was an outpouring of the Spirit that was missing in their own lives and that an openness to the power of the Spirit would accelerate the church growth for which they were hoping. OMF missionaries started to hold special meetings for all who were interested in baptism in the Spirit and the gift of tongues. Field Council became increasingly concerned about this development. OMF prided itself on its interdenominational status and the fact that those representing different theological positions were able to work alongside one another. The intolerant exclusive position of the Pentecostal movement, which insisted on baptism in the Spirit and the gift of tongues for all believers, threatened the unity of the mission. OMF responded quickly by producing

³⁶ Dr. Chris Maddox, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁷ Dr. Chris Maddox to Arnold J. Lea, 16 September 1956, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

a document detailing the mission's position on the Spirit.³⁸ This consisted of a strategy for restraining the Pentecostal movement rather than a theology of the Spirit. Missionaries were permitted to speak in tongues in private but forbidden from speaking in tongues in public meetings or from promoting the baptism of the Spirit or the use of the gift of tongues. All who were unwilling to abide by OMF's guidelines were asked to leave the mission. By the end of 1969 eight OMF missionaries had left Central Thailand because they were unwilling to accept OMF's position on the Pentecostal movement.

During this period the role of medical evangelism was being critically reassessed. Maddox had been asked to resign and his successor had recommended that the mission set limits for the expansion of the medical work. With Maddox departure in 1969 and Faulkner's retirement in 1970 the composition of Field Council was significantly altered.³⁹ Those in favour of medical evangelism were no longer as influential as they had been and new missionaries were no longer compelled to provide assistance at the leprosy clinics.

Church growth methods pioneered by Donald McGavran were becoming increasingly popular. McGavran was having a significant impact on the theology of mission developing within the evangelical movement. He advocated the exclusive emphasis on evangelism and church planting. Mission was "gospel-proclaiming,

³⁷ Ian Roberts, interview with Patricia McLean.

³⁸ OMF clarified its policy toward the charismatic movement at the Overseas Council in 1969 after Sanders presented a paper on the movement. (Minutes of the Overseas Council, 19 March 1966), OMF International Headquarters; J. Oswald Sanders, "The Charismatic Movement: The Third Force in Christendom," (paper presented the Overseas Council, 19 March 1966), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore). A further paper on the charismatic movement was presented at Overseas Council in 1972, (Denis Lane, "Charismatic Affairs," (paper presented at the Overseas Council, 7 October 1972), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore).

³⁹ Maddox was asked to carry on working at Manorom Christian Hospital for two years after his resignation in 1967 in order that he might oversee the construction of a the new hospital wing. See Chapter Four: 2. A. 4. a), "Tension between Medical Work and Church Work."

sinner-converting, church-multiplying evangelism.”⁴⁰ He maintained that missionaries should concentrate on evangelising people who are responsive to the Gospel rather than those who show little interest in the Gospel. He insisted that new groups should be composed of converts from the same cultural and religious background and believed that those new groups should engage in evangelising their community immediately. The success of a mission was expressed in terms of the number of people converted and baptised.

During the 1960s McGavran’s ideas began to permeate the missionary community in Thailand. In 1963 a coordinator of evangelism was appointed to plan intensive evangelistic campaigns. In 1965 those who had been working on the landrover, or ‘Gospel Rover,’ since 1958 linked up with the coordinator of evangelism to form the evangelistic team. This team was responsible for coordinating campaigns, promoting church growth and recording church statistics. In 1967 the entire Field Conference was devoted to an exposition of the church growth movement.

The church growth movement advocated contextual evangelism that encouraged the missionaries to show a greater interest in Thai Buddhist culture. At Field Conference in 1967 Howard Hatton presented a paper ‘Church Growth and Sociological Issues’ in which he challenged the predominant negative assessment of Thai Buddhist culture prevailing among OMF missionaries, contending that they had to make the transition from “cynics into sympathetic preachers of the Gospel,” and argued that OMF missionaries needed to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of Thai Buddhist culture if they were to communicate effectively in Central Thailand.⁴¹ Hatton insisted: “I am not claiming that this knowledge alone will help us to gain converts; but it will certainly aid in the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the churches along lines more compatible with Thai culture.”⁴² Hatton concluded by

⁴⁰ A. F. Glasser and D. A. McGavran, *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 71.

⁴¹ Howard Hatton, “Church Growth and Sociological Issues,” (paper presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, December 1967), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴² Ibid.

stating that the weak state of the OMF-planted churches in Central Thailand was evidence that OMF had not yet resolved these basic problems. Hatton's paper is an example of the more positive assessment of culture being expressed by evangelicals during this period. These ideas received some attention at Lausanne and were developed further at the consultation on Gospel and Culture held at Willowbank in 1978.

In accordance with the principles of the church growth movement advocated by McGavran large scale evangelistic campaigns were carried out in areas deemed to be responsive to the Gospel. The campaigns were carried out during the dry season, between April and June. They were staffed by large numbers of Thai Christian students from Phayao Bible College⁴³ and the Christian Service Training Centre⁴⁴ (CSTC) in Chiangmai who were recruited to work in Central Thailand during their vacation. The students were instrumental in the initial evangelism and also remained in the area afterwards to follow up those who had shown an interest in the Gospel and establish cell churches.⁴⁵ At the end of 1971 Ray Cooling, Field Superintendent, reported: "The attack of the past year has only been possible because of the participation of teams from outside Central Thailand."⁴⁶

Despite the widely reported success of the campaigns they sustained heavy criticism. Many felt that Thai Buddhists, who were reckoned to have converted to Christianity, were in fact doing little more than registering an interest in Christianity and had not fully understood the message of the Gospel. Hoping to resolve the misunderstandings arising the Church Planting Committee met to discuss the term 'profession of faith.' However, it was unable to agree on a definition.⁴⁷ The minutes do not provide details about the discussion other than to say it lasted for forty-five minutes. One may

⁴³ Phayao Bible College was founded by OMF missionaries in 1966.

⁴⁴ CSTC was a department within the Thailand Theological Seminary set up in 1961.

⁴⁵ See: Smith, *Strategy to Multiply Rural Churches: A Central Thailand Case Study*.

⁴⁶ Ray Cooling, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 1971), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Church Planting Committee, 26 April 1973, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

surmise that while some felt an initial interest in, or demonstration of commitment to, the Gospel was evidence of faith, others would have preferred the term was only used to refer to those who had made a definite commitment to Christianity.

Consequently some missionaries felt compelled to reassess the reported statistics in accordance with more conservative estimates of actual response.⁴⁸ Field Council, however, was convinced of the success of the campaigns. Bennett, who succeeded Cooling as Field Superintendent, wrote: "After twenty years of effort in Central Thailand it can now be said that we have an effective method of evangelism and follow up for the rural areas."⁴⁹

Convinced of the necessity of establishing an urban church OMF shifted its evangelistic emphasis from the villages to the towns and cities. The growing number of Thai church workers coupled with a reduction in the number of missionaries meant that evangelism in the urban areas was increasingly carried out by Thai Christians rather than foreign missionaries. In addition to OMF-trained lay leaders, graduates from Maranatha Bible College were returning to pastor the *sala* churches and graduates from Phayao Bible College were returning to pastor the well believers' churches. In October 1965 the Association of Churches in Central Thailand began to support their first full-time church worker, Pastor Samyong Songsan Paropsin. Pastor Samyong had been converted to Christianity by OMF missionaries in Pichit and subsequently employed by the mission at Manorom Christian Hospital. That same year Pastor Tong-Yu, a leprosy patient from Uthai, returned from Maranatha Bible College and began to work as a full-time pastor in Sawang, Uthai province. Pastor Boonma Wayhuay, also a leprosy patient, returned from Maranatha Bible College in 1968 to serve as full-time area pastor in Lopburi province. Pastor Boonma recalled: "I was the first pastor in the Associated Churches in Central Thailand for these four

⁴⁸ Tom Overton, Uthai Station Report, 21 October 1975 (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 11-16 November 1975), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁹ Alan Bennett, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report, 16 November 1974 (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 18-22 November 1974), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

provinces. Those churches had no pastor. I was the first one.”⁵⁰ Pastor Tong-Yu and Pastor Boonma were joined by Pastor Boonmee Meelon in January 1969. Pastor Boonmee, also a leprosy patient and graduate of Maranatha Bible College, worked as an area pastor in Uthai province. In 1972 Lopburi *Sala* Church appointed another church worker, the first female worker in the *sala* churches, Pastor Oorai.

In 1969 the church in Nongbua appointed Pastor Yu-Pah as a part-time evangelist and Bible teacher. She was the first female church worker in the well churches. The same year Pastor Tongin and Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, both young men in their early twenties, graduated from Phayao Bible College and started work in Angthong.⁵¹ In 1970 the church in Nongbua appointed another worker, Pastor Nom, a local Christian, to pastor the Christians in Chumsaeng, Tartago and Nongbua, three district towns of Nakhon Sawan province. In 1975 Singburi church appointed a pastor, Pastor Pairot, a graduate of Phayao Bible College.⁵² That same year Pastor Samryt, who had previously been working as a pastor in Uthai and was the first to receive financial support from OMF, was appointed by Manorom church to work both in the church and the hospital. The Manorom *sala* church supported Pastor Wichian, a local Christian, to work as a hospital evangelist. In 1975 a group of graduates from Phayao Bible College established the Phayao Home Missions Board (PHMB). The Board was committed to placing and supporting Thai Christian workers in Thailand. However, despite the increasing number of Thai Christian leaders in the church, the mission was still making critical decisions about the development of the church.

⁵⁰Pastor Boonma Wayhuay, interview by C. R. Hillier, 16 February 1999, Manorom, Chainat, tape recording, translated by W Thompson.

⁵¹ Emerson Frey, Report on Lopburi, Singburi, Saraburi, and Angthong (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 6-11 December 1977), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵² Alan Bennett, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report (report presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 13-14 May 1975), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

B. The Relationship between the Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the Associated Churches in Thailand - Central

OMF rejected the invitation to work with the established Protestant church in Thailand (CCT) and the associated foreign mission (APM). It worked alone and its work produced churches unrelated to the previously established church. As a mission it was primarily concerned about its relationship with the emerging OMF-planted churches and not with the established CCT church. OMF's policy on the relationship between mission and church, that informed its relationship with the emerging OMF-planted churches in Thailand, had been drafted in China where CIM had worked with established Chinese churches. Handing over leadership of the church to Chinese Christians and requiring missionaries to submit themselves to the authority of the Chinese church had been a viable option. Implementing that policy in Thailand was complicated by the lack of Thai Christians and immaturity of the OMF-planted churches in Thailand. Initially every effort was made to implement that policy. However, increasing frustration with the slow growth of the church forced the missionaries to question the appropriateness of its operational principles. Eventually, in 1960 OMF missionaries in Central Thailand agreed that it was necessary for OMF missionaries to play a more active role in the affairs of the Thai church. Their dismissal of the ecumenical movement meant they were unaware, or at least unresponsive to, the insights on mission-church relations expounded there.

The changing practice of mission-church relations was discussed at Overseas Council in 1960.⁵³ The mission's Directors recognised that in many areas of Southeast Asia, including Thailand, a different model of mission-church relations was emerging than that previously practiced in China. Rather than working under the authority of an established national church missionaries were responsible for the development of a fledgling church. The Directors accepted that the original principles were not entirely appropriate for the new fields but continued to stress the importance of involving national Christians in church development at all stages of the work.

⁵³ Minutes of the Overseas Council, May 1960, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

In Central Thailand missionaries were becoming increasingly confident in their role as apostles and elders of the Thai church. Their active participation in church affairs was accompanied by an increasing unwillingness to recognise the initiative of Thai Christians and facilitate the emergence of Thai church leaders. Consequently the mission actively pursued its vision for the church without allowing that vision to be modified by Thai Christians. Although the Central Committee had been elected by the Association of Churches in Central Thailand to oversee the development of the churches, the mission repeatedly rejected the Central Committee's suggestions. When the Central Committee suggested that the church and mission pool their resources in order to fund a full-time church worker, the mission was unwilling to contribute, arguing that financial assistance was "in direct contravention of Mission policy."⁵⁴ When the Central Committee proposed that the chairman and vice-chairman of the Central Committee should be responsible for baptising all new Christians, the mission intervened contending that the local church should be independent of the committee and free to invite whom they pleased to conduct baptismal services.⁵⁵ When the Central Committee decided to contribute financially to impoverished Christians and churches in the Association of Churches in Central Thailand, the mission intervened and insisted that the local church was the responsibility of the local church.⁵⁶ Eventually, disappointed with the Central Committee and concerned that the committee was exercising too much control over the local church, Field Council reconstituted the committee. The offices of chairman and vice-chairman were removed. Three, rather than one, OMF advisors were 'invited' to join the committee and the committee's remit was reduced to organising the annual conference. Corresponding with the OMF Area Director, Rowland Butler, in July 1962 Faulkner reported that the Central Committee was critical of the

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 13 February 1959, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 25 November to 3 December 1959, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵⁶ Cyril Faulkner, Central Thailand, to Rowland Butler, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore, 9 July 1962, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

missionaries' act of limiting the powers of the committee. Faulkner wrote: "Arphon was too polite, in Eastern manner, to accuse the missionaries of changing what had already been established, but that is what it amounted to."⁵⁷

The Central Committee was reconstituted in 1962. At that time there were too few Thai Christians able or willing to challenge the mission's control of the church. That soon changed. By the end of the 1960s the first Thai Christian theological graduates had begun to return to the churches in Central Thailand. Their presence prompted the church and the mission to reconsider church-mission relations. The graduates, appointed as evangelists and pastors in Central Thailand, wanted to be more actively involved in the development of the Association of Churches in Central Thailand and were critical of the mission's domination of church affairs.⁵⁸ The missionaries working alongside the Thai graduates were uncertain how to relate to them. At Field Conference in 1969 Rowland Bell, OMF missionary resident in Manorom, asked: "It would be interesting to hear what the conference thinks our relationship should be towards these national pastors. Have we as a field any worked-out plan for such people?"⁵⁹

OMF's policy required it to hand over full responsibility for the church to the national Christians and to submit itself as a mission to the authority of the church. However, many missionaries were resistant to implementing this policy. There was a marked ambivalence between ideal and practice. As Arnold J. Lea, General Director of OMF, had previously said: "Almost all missionaries believe in national leadership in church and institutions... up to a point; that point being where national leadership differs from what the missionary would do himself."⁶⁰ Reporting to Overseas

⁵⁷ Cyril Faulkner, Central Thailand, to Rowland Butler, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore, 9 July 1962, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁵⁸ Isaac Scott, Report on OMF's work in Thailand and Laos (presented at Overseas Council, 9 October 1971), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁵⁹ Rowland Bell, Report on Uthai, 29 October 1969 (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 11-18 November 1969), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁶⁰ Arnold J. Lea, "A Survey of the Work being done among the Established Churches" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 3 October 1964), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

Council in 1971 Scott, Thailand Area Director, argued that although it was possible for the older churches in Thailand, such as CCT, to manage their own affairs, it was not a viable option for the younger churches, such as the OMF-planted churches in Central Thailand. He insisted that if the OMF-planted churches in Central Thailand were to move in a similar direction to CCT, it would lead to “nothing but problems and difficulties.”⁶¹

OMF Directors in Singapore stressed the importance of including Thai Christians in all church and mission matters but were otherwise unwilling to intervene. Eventually in 1976 Central Thailand Field Council invited three Thai pastors to join the Church Planting Committee: Pastor Wicharn, pastor of Chainat church, Pastor Samryt, pastor of Manorom church and Pastor Boonmee, area pastor of the *sala* churches in Uthai. Bennett, Field Superintendent, described the presence of Thai Christians on a mission committee as “similar to missionaries being advisors on the church committees.”⁶² The Thai pastors joined the Church Planting Committee for four of seven meetings in 1976, at which point the missionaries recommended that Thai Christians were not invited to join mission committees in future because of the difficulties associated with conducting the meeting in Thai.⁶³ At the end of 1976 the Church Planting Committee was dissolved and replaced by a Church Planters’ Forum and Church Workers’ Committee. Thai Christians were never invited to join the forum or committee. This matter was not reconsidered until 1983.

In January 1983 the newly formed Church Workers’ Council agreed to invite the Central Committee to attend the Church Workers’ Council and Church Planters Forum “when appropriate matters are to be discussed.”⁶⁴ However, other OMF

⁶¹ Isaac Scott, Report on OMF’s work in Thailand and Laos (presented at Overseas Council, 9 October 1971), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁶² Alan Bennett to OMF missionaries in Central Thailand, 1 March 1976, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁶³ Alan Bennett, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report (report presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 6-11 December 1977), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Church Workers Council, 26 January 1983, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

missionaries in Central Thailand were unwilling to accept the presence of Thai Christians on the council and at forum. Two months after inviting the Central Committee to join the missionaries it was necessary for Ian Roberts, Field Superintendent, to warn the missionaries that their negative attitude towards Thai Christians was having a detrimental effect on the church. The minutes recorded: "Our criticism of Thai Christians is robbing the church of spiritual power, 'brainwashing' us into believing that 'they can't do it', and poisoning our personal relationships."⁶⁵ The Church Workers' Council responded to the discontent amongst the missionaries by establishing a separate Thai Church Workers' Forum. Missionaries were invited, but not required, to attend these forums.

The objective of the Thai Church Workers' Forums was to promote more positive relationships between mission and church and provide the arena in which policy matters might be discussed. Pastor Wicharn, pastor of Chainat church, said that he approached the mission and asked them to instigate such forums in order that the missionaries and the Thai church workers could work more closely together. The meetings took place three to four times a year. Initially the Thai pastors attended regularly. Thai pastors and missionaries who chose to attend started to build more positive relationships with one another. As missionaries and church workers got to know one another they were able to begin to discuss mission and church policy. The Thai pastors, however, became increasingly frustrated with the missionaries' perceived unwillingness to seriously consider matters of policy at forum. By the mid 1990s the senior Thai pastors in Central Thailand had stopped attending the forums. Bob Trelogan, a senior missionary, explained that an increasing number of Thai pastors were unhappy with the mission's continuing control of church affairs and many missionaries' paternalistic attitude towards Thai Christians.⁶⁶

OMF's method of distributing financial assistance to the church in Central Thailand reinforced its authority over the Thai church. OMF considered channelling its

⁶⁵ Minutes of the Church Planters Forum, 20-21 May 1983, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁶⁶ Bob Trelogan, interview by Patricia McLean, 5 May 1999, Bangkok, tape recording.

financial support through two Thai bodies: PHMB⁶⁷ or the Central Committee.⁶⁸ The Church Planters Forum decided that it would rather direct its financial contributions via the Central Committee than through PHMB. It argued that if the church workers were supported by PHMB they would be responsible to PHMB, rather than the local church or the Association of Churches in Central Thailand. Arguably, the mission recognised that although it had a significant influence on the Central Committee it had no influence with PHMB. The Central Committee, however, did not want the responsibility for managing the money. Rather than reconsider channelling the money through PHMB, OMF decided to give the support directly to the church workers. The money was not redirected via the Central Committee until July 1991. Even then OMF missionaries remained voting members of the sub-committee responsible for distributing the money.

Thai church workers believed that their financial support came directly from mission funds. This led them to consider themselves directly responsible to mission personnel and made it increasingly difficult for them to challenge the mission's control of church affairs. Pastor Wicharn said the Thai workers are not bold enough to question the mission's control because the mission provides for them: "the mission is their rice pot."⁶⁹ OMF has not done enough to correct this understanding, which still exists today. In an interview with Arend Van Dorp, Central Thailand Director,⁷⁰ he remarked that when he is present at a Central Committee meeting the discussion ends when he speaks. Asked why this should be, he said: "Because I hold the purse,

⁶⁷ The PHMB was established in 1975 by a group of Phayao Bible College graduates. It was committed to providing financial support to Phayao graduates working in the churches in Thailand. See Chapter Four: 3. A., "The Overseas Missionary Fellowship's and Associated Churches in Thailand's Approach to Evangelism."

⁶⁸ The Central Committee was elected by the local churches in Central Thailand to oversee the work of the Association of Churches in Central Thailand. See Chapter Four: 2. A. 4. c). (1)., "The Well Believers' Church."

⁶⁹ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier, 15 January 1999, Chainat, tape recording, translated by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁰ The term Superintendent was replaced by the term Director in 1996.

whether you like it or not.”⁷¹ When clarification was sought he replied: “Well they realise that it is not their money, it is not the churches money, it is OMF’s money. It is just reality.”⁷²

OMF continues to manage mission and church affairs. Missionaries act as advisors on all church committees and have a significant influence on those committees. Thai Christians have not been invited to join the mission committees, which remain the primary decision making bodies for both church and mission. Two pastors, Pastor Wicharn, of Chainat church, and Pastor Khwanchai Chamwisut, of Angthong church, have expressed their dissatisfaction with mission-church relations by initiating their own Thai church association. The association is run by Thai Christians, for Thai Christians. Missionaries have not been invited to join their meetings.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of OMF and ACTC in Thailand between 1951-1998 reveals that OMF was unable to transfer the policy toward mission-church relations, inherited from its predecessor organisation CIM, to the work in Thailand. CIM policy, that distinguished between the church-planting role of missionaries and the self-governing authority of the indigenous churches, was deemed to be inappropriate to the OMF-planted churches in Thailand and OMF missionaries were encouraged to assume an increasingly dominant role in the Thai church. By 1960 Field Conference had agreed “a firmer leadership and more authoritative stand should be made by the missionaries, and that caution was necessary lest responsibility be handed over to the believers too soon.”⁷³ OMF missionaries’ hegemony over the Thai church increased throughout the later half of the century. They repeatedly refused to listen to the recommendations of the Central Committee and eventually curbed its powers. They were unwilling to invite Thai Christians to participate on OMF committees and

⁷¹ Arend Van Dorp, interview by Patricia McLean, 1 June 1999, Lopburi, tape recording.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Rose Dobles, Report on the annual Central Thailand Field Conference on 23-30 November 1960 for the Overseas Bulletin, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok. See Chapter Four: 2. A. 2., “OMF Policy: The Relationship Between Mission and Church.”

insisted on maintaining OMF-only committees that served as decision-making bodies for church and mission affairs. They reinforced their position of authority over ACTC by insisting that financial subsidies were directed through OMF-dominated committees, perpetuating the belief that OMF controlled the funds and the workers supported by those funds.

This radical change in policy was encouraged, and justified in the view of most OMF missionaries, by the missionaries' denigration of Thai Buddhist culture and their presupposition that Thai Christians were incapable of exercising leadership. Despite more positive appraisals of Thai Buddhist culture, most notably Howard Hatton's paper on 'Church Growth and Sociological Issues,' their interest in Thai Buddhist culture was primarily pragmatic, namely as a means to communicate the Gospel to Thai Buddhists. They were not interested in learning from Thai Buddhist culture. Their attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture are directly related to their attitudes towards Thai Christians. OMF missionaries have been manifestly unwilling to accept Thai Christians as equal partners in mission.

OMF's theological presuppositions influenced its negative attitude toward Thai Buddhist culture. They believed that God's presence and work was restricted to the church and that the world, outwith the church, was the domain of Satan. Consequently they found it immensely difficult to develop a positive approach to Thai Buddhist culture. OMF missionaries' attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism will be explored more fully in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five: The American Presbyterian Missionaries' Approach to Thai Buddhism

1. Introduction

Within the historical framework of APM presented in Chapter Three this chapter will explore the American Presbyterian missionaries' approach to Thai Buddhism. It will assess their interest in Thai Buddhism, what initiatives were taken to understand Thai Buddhism and what attitudes were displayed toward Thai Buddhism. It will argue that, with the re-establishment of APM in Thailand, APM encouraged its personnel in Thailand to develop a more irenic, explorative approach to Thai Buddhism than its missionaries had adopted prior to the war. The chapter will contend that this eventuated in a diversity of theological appraisals of Thai Buddhism, ranging from appreciation of the sincerity of Thai Buddhist spirituality to affirmation of Thai Buddhism as an efficient means of salvation for its devout practitioners. These attitudes reflected currents of contemporary Christian thinking about the Gospel and other faiths represented, for example, in WCC. The chapter will demonstrate that this new thinking found mixed reaction among Thai Buddhist Christians, most of whom were critical of dialogue with Buddhists.

2. Increasingly Diverse Attitudes Towards and Understanding of Thai Buddhism

A. New Initiatives in Thai Buddhist Studies

Representatives of BFM and APM met on 12 March 1943 and again at a Consultative Conference on 18-20 October 1944 to discuss the future of APM in Thailand.¹ They agreed that after more than 100 years APM had "not made much of an impression on Buddhism," that few Thai Buddhists had converted to Christianity and that consequently the church was very small and very weak.² They contended

¹ Report on the Meeting to Discuss APM in Thailand, 12 March 1943, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; Minutes of the Consultative Conference, 18-20 October 1944, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

² Report on the Meeting to Discuss AMP in Thailand, 12 March 1943, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

that the missionaries' negative attitudes towards Buddhism and lack of understanding of Buddhism were in part responsible for the slow growth of the Thai church. They recommended that American Presbyterian missionaries intending to return to Thailand after the war should be encouraged to spend time studying Buddhism as an essential element in their devising a new Christian approach to Buddhism in Thailand.

Three American Presbyterian missionaries had shown an interest in Thai Buddhism before the war: Revs. John and Paul Eakin and Dr. Kenneth Wells.³ All three were motivated by a desire to communicate the Gospel more effectively to Thai Buddhists. Although they expressed an interest in classical Buddhism they were primarily concerned with Thai Buddhism, believing that a greater understanding of Thai Buddhism, particularly of the similarities and differences between Thai Buddhism and Christianity, would enhance their missionary efforts.

Immediately after the war the APM Language Committee was responsible for overseeing the missionaries' Thai language study, orientation to Thai Buddhist culture and introduction to Thai Buddhism. In 1952 the Language Committee was augmented by the Orientation Committee, a Joint Advisory Committee composed of both Thai Christians and American missionaries. The Orientation Committee took over responsibility for the missionaries' orientation to Thai Buddhist culture and introduction to Thai Buddhism. On 31 October – 10 November 1952 the Orientation Committee organised an Orientation Conference and invited a respected Buddhist priest to lecture on Thai Buddhism. Similar meetings were held in 1953, 1954 and 1955, and all missionaries were issued with a copy of Wells's, *A Brief Outline of Buddhism*.⁴ While all American Presbyterian missionaries were given the

³ John A. Eakin, "Entering a Stronghold," *The Siam Outlook* 6, no. 7 (1928), 226-228; Paul A. Eakin, "High Criticism of the Buddhist Scriptures in Siam," 24-28; idem, "A Wheel within the Wheel of the Law in Siam," 440-449; Kenneth E. Wells, *Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities* (Bangkok: Suriyaban, 1939).

⁴ Report of the Orientation Committee, June 1952-November 1954, APM, PUA, Chiangmai. Kenneth E. Wells, *A Brief Outline of Buddhism*, typescript, n.p., n.d.

opportunity to acquire a rudimentary understanding of Thai Buddhism, some developed considerable expertise in this field. Paul Eakin and Wells, who had begun to study Thai Buddhism before the war, continued to show an interest in and publish material on Thai Buddhism.⁵ Rev. Francis Seely, who arrived in Thailand immediately after the war, evidenced a growing interest in Thai Buddhism. Initially he was appointed as an evangelist to Lampang where he worked with the Christian Leprosy Foundation, encouraging Buddhists and Christians to come together to meet the needs of those with leprosy in the community. Later he was recruited to work at the Thailand Theological Seminary where he devoted much of his time to the study of Thai Buddhism and development of an alternative Christian approach to Thai Buddhists.⁶ Rev. Herbert Grether, Principle of Thailand Theological Seminary, and Rev. Sinclair Thompson, lecturer at the seminary, were also extremely interested in Thai Buddhism and keen to explore ways in which Christianity might be communicated effectively to Thai Buddhists. Grether published a number of works on Thai Buddhism and the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.⁷ Seely, Grether and Thompson were all involved in revising the Thai translation of the Bible and while doing so began to use Thai Buddhist and Pali terms to translate Christian concepts.⁸

In 1954 Rev. C. Basil Jackson visited Ceylon, Burma and Thailand with a view to establishing a Christian Institute of Buddhist studies that would serve all three countries. Jackson concluded that in Thailand Buddhism was relatively weak and did not represent a significant threat to the Thai church.⁹ Ryburn asked Seely, Grether

⁵ Paul A Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand* (Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1956); Kenneth E. Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 2* (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranasar, 1963).

⁶ Seely, "Some Problems in Translating the Scriptures in Thai," 49-61; Seely, "Thai Buddhism and the Christian Faith," 132-140.

⁷ Grether, "The Revision of the Thai Bible," 9-19; idem, "Buddhism in Thailand Today," 32-40; idem, "The Cross and the Bodhi Tree," 446-458.

⁸ See Chapter Five: 7., "The Acculturation of Christianity in Thai Buddhist Culture."

⁹ Rev. C. Basil Jackson, Report of a Visit to Burma and Thailand, 2-10 June 1954, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

and Thompson to respond to Jackson's report. All three argued that Jackson had significantly underestimated Buddhism in Thailand. Seely contended: "Thai Buddhism is not evangelistically enthusiastic. However, it is not on the verge of collapse either."¹⁰ Thompson contested: "Part of Buddhism's very vigour is its peaceful and absolutely unchallenged role in so many aspects of Thai life. Buddhism, to most Thais, does not need to demonstrate its superiority to other religious systems – this is simply self-evident."¹¹ All three were excited by the prospect of a Christian Institute of Buddhist Studies in Southeast Asia but were unsure how the Thai church would respond. They were not surprised when Rev. Tongkham Pantupongse, a member of the Executive Committee of CCT, diplomatically suggested that CCT was not yet ready for such an Institute, reasoning that the Christian study of Buddhism represented a more "advanced stage which we have not yet reached."¹²

The Evaluation Conference in 1955 discussed what more could be done to encourage American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians to engage with Thai Buddhism. The conference agreed that the Thailand Theological Seminary should be the locus of further study. Hamlin, the Principal of the seminary, was authorised to recruit a specialist in Buddhist studies.¹³ Ryburn insisted: "We definitely need a man who is, as I see it, totally immersed in Buddhism."¹⁴ Hamlin's efforts to recruit such a person were unsuccessful and American Presbyterian missionaries, in particular Wells, Grether and Seely, continued teaching Buddhism in the seminary. After attending the EACC Conference on Buddhism in Burma, 8-9 February 1961, Grether reported that he found the conference "most stimulating" and hoped "to make use of the experience while teaching Buddhism at the seminary."¹⁵ The following year Grether invited a Buddhist priest to teach Buddhism in the seminary. He reported:

¹⁰ Rev. Francis Seely, Report on Rev. C Basil Jackson's visit to Thailand on 2-10 June 1954, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹¹ Rev. Sinclair Thompson, Report on Rev. C Basil Jackson's visit to Thailand on 2-10 June 1954, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹² Rev. Horace Ryburn to Rev. G. Basil Jackson, 8 November 1954, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹³ Minutes of the Evaluation Conference, 30-31 January 1956, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁴ Rev. Horace Ryburn to Dr. Donald Swearer, 13 February 1963, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁵ Rev. Herbert Grether, Annual Personal Report, 1961, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

“This is the way to learn this subject. He said more in four hours than I could have said in four weeks.”¹⁶

A one-day conference devoted to exploring how Buddhist studies might be developed in Thailand was held on 16 January 1959 in New York. Wells, Grether and Seely were all invited to present papers at the conference.¹⁷ The papers reiterated what advocates of Buddhist studies had been saying since the Consultative Conference in 1943: that most missionaries did not understand Buddhism and that their unwillingness to engage with Buddhism was having a negative effect on Christian mission in Thailand. Wells contended: “In the past 130 years all too many missionaries to Thailand have come and gone without really understanding Buddhism. And those who have come since the Second World War are no better than their fathers in this respect.”¹⁸ Wells insisted: “Our Christian witness to the Thai has been hampered by our half-knowledge of Thai Buddhism.”¹⁹

B Towards Dialogue: The Emergence of Christian-Buddhist Dialogue in Thailand amidst American and Thai Opposition

Throughout the 1950s the American Presbyterians who had shown a particular interest in studying Buddhism were united in their belief that an adequate understanding of Buddhism was an essential precursor to effective evangelism in Thailand. By the end of the decade, however, Seely had begun to articulate a radically different understanding of Christianity and Buddhism. He no longer affirmed the importance of evangelism to Buddhists or necessity of conversion of Buddhists to Christianity, but proposed instead that Christians should study Buddhism in order to promote better relationships between Buddhists and Christians, to encourage Buddhists and Christians to work together, and to enable Buddhists and

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Albert Sanders to Rev. John Smith, Rev. Horace Ryburn, Dr. Kenneth Wells, Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, Rev. Herbert Grether, Rev. Francis Seely, Mr. and Mrs. Jay Johnson, 2 January 1959, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁸ Dr. Kenneth Wells, “The Present Need to Study Thai Buddhism” (paper presented at a one-day conference in New York, 16 January 1959), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Christians to understand and appreciate their own faith as well as each others.²⁰

Much later Seely recalled that the one-day conference in New York was “a turning point where I began thinking seriously about dialogue.”²¹ WCC had begun to explore the Christian approach to other faiths and Seely’s ideas reflected the thinking of some within WCC.

In 1959, after the one-day conference in New York, Seely organised the first meeting for religious dialogue. The meeting was held in the CCT headquarters in Bangkok and attended by three Buddhist priests, two French Jesuits and two Protestant fraternal workers.²² Ryburn reported: “So far as we are able to discern this is the first such meeting of its kind in Thailand, a second meeting is planned for 1960.”²³ Shortly after Seely proposed the establishment of a Buddhist-Christian Study Centre: “A place where people could engage with those of another religion, learn about another religion and join common projects, not for proselytisation.”²⁴ However, the proposal was rejected by the Department of Religious Affairs which would not condone a Christian institute of religious studies.

On 8 July 1961 Thompson was killed in a railway accident. Thompson had been “vitaly interested in the subject of the Christian understanding of Buddhism today” and was about to begin doctoral studies in Thai Buddhism.²⁵ In his memory the seminary established the ‘Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures’ funded by the ‘Sinclair Thompson Memorial Fund.’ The annual series of lectures were devoted to the study of Christianity and Buddhism. Dr. Malcolm Stewart, Professor of

²⁰ Rev. Francis Seely, “A Preliminary Draft of a Statement to the Presbytery,” November 1957, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²¹ Rev. Francis Seely to Maen Pongudom, 21 September 1977, MRP, PUA, Chiangmai.

²² Rev. Horace Ryburn, Thailand Annual Report, 1959, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rev. Francis Seely, “Tentative Proposal for a Buddhist-Christian Study Centre,” 10 November 1964, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²⁵ Introduction to Rev. William James Sinclair Thompson, 1915-1961 in M. F Stewart, *Religion and Personal Experience: Buddhist and Christian Emphases, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 1* (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranasar, 1962), 3.

Philosophy and Religion at Illinois College, was invited to give the first series of lectures in November 1962. Stewart emphasised the common experiences of Christians and Buddhists by exploring the concept of 'the religious person,' Christian and Buddhist.²⁶ Wells was invited to give the second series of lectures.²⁷ He hoped that his lectures would "help Thai Christians adopt a more reasonable attitude toward Buddhism based on sure facts."²⁸ He also wanted to show Buddhists that Buddhism did not have much to offer, but admitted to John Hamlin: "To say this inoffensively is the problem. It is a bit presumptuous for me to assume that my attitude towards Buddhism is normative and correct."²⁹ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai monk and Buddhist apologist, was invited to give the lectures in 1967.³⁰ Unlike previous lectures Buddhadasa's lectures were well attended by both Buddhists and Christians. However, many Thai Christians in the CCT were highly critical of the seminary's decision to invite a Buddhist to speak.³¹

The Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures played a critical role in Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Thailand. Christians and Buddhists began to talk to one another, to understand one another and to build relationships with one another. However, critiquing Thai Protestant Christianity's approach to Thai Buddhism, Cohen, a sociologist from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, argued that the lectures "never exceeded a learned comparison between the two religions by both Christian and Buddhist theologians, and have not facilitated the formulation of a clear theological position on the part of the Protestants."³²

²⁶ Stewart, *Religion and Personal Experience: Buddhist and Christian Emphases*.

²⁷ Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*.

²⁸ Dr. Kenneth Wells to Rev. Horace Ryburn, 2 April 1963, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

²⁹ Dr. Kenneth Wells to Dr. John Hamlin, 2 June 1963, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁰ Buddhadasa, *Christianity and Buddhism*. See Chapter One: 4., "Recent Innovations in Thai Buddhism."

³¹ Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

³² Erik Cohen, "Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand: The 'Battle of the Axes' and the 'Contest of Power,'" unpublished paper, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, n.d., published as: Erik Cohen, "Christianity and Buddhism in Thailand: The 'Battle of the Axes' and the 'Contest of Power,'" *Social Compass* 38, no. 2 (1991), 115-140.

In 1971 the church officers of CCT recommended that Seely should be one of nine UPC fraternal workers to leave Thailand. Seely's theological stance may have influenced their decision. Few Thai Christians understood or sympathised with Seely's theological position. Dr. Maen contended: "Thai Christians didn't like what Francis was saying and they even questioned why he came to Thailand."³³ Rev. Allan Eubank, a Disciple's missionary who worked with Seely, recalled: "The General Secretary of CCT told me that Francis was not a missionary because he did not believe that Christ was the way to God but taught that all ways lead to God."³⁴ Seely did not, however, leave immediately. John Hamlin helped Seely to arrange alternative means of support and stay on at the seminary for two more years, 1972-1974. Hamlin later admitted that he "took flak" for supporting Seely in this way.³⁵

In 1974 Seely was again forced to seek alternative means of support if he wanted to carry on working in Thailand. With the financial support of the Foundation for Inter-religious Dialogue, set up by Seely in America, Seely established the '*Dhamma-Logos Project*' (DLP) in Thailand. Seely stated: "The objective is not proselytism, but creative exchange between people of various faiths... The project and foundation will attempt to remain unaligned with any particular religious tradition."³⁶ Seely nevertheless asked CCT to endorse the project as an approved extra-budget project, for which extra-budget gifts could be solicited in UPC. In May 1974 the Executive Committee of CCT met to discuss Seely's request. The minutes record:

The matter for consideration concerns DLP. Rev. Seely has asked CCT to officially recognise the project as its own. The meeting considered this from all angles and voted not to recognise DLP. CCT has nothing to do with, and does not agree with, this project because it feels that the work of CCT in these days is directed towards the Lord Jesus Christ only. He is the answer for all Thai people.³⁷

³³ Dr. Maen Pongudom, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁴ Rev. Allan Eubank, interview by Patricia McLean, 12 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

³⁵ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁶ Rev. Francis Seely, "The Dharma Logos Project", 29 April 1977, DLP, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁷ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Church of Christ in Thailand, 17 May 1974, CCT, PUA, Chiangmai.

Ryburn, who was present at the meeting, wrote to Seely explaining,

The Executive Committee of the church feels that, at the present time in Thailand, the first priority is evangelism, by which, as I understand it, the Executive Committee means the effort to make clear that Jesus Christ can fulfil the highest aspirations of Thai people.³⁸

In December 1974 Dr. Koson Srisang was elected as General Secretary of CCT succeeding Rev. Charoon Wichaidist. Unlike Rev. Charoon Dr. Koson was in favour of inter-religious dialogue and supportive of Seely and DLP. In November 1975 Dr. Koson reversed the earlier decision of the Executive Committee regarding the recognition of DLP and allowed it to solicit funds in UPC.³⁹ DLP was able to employ Rev. Tananone Baw as Deputy Director and open a new centre in Chiangmai. DLP began to publish the DLP Bulletin and organised a course on Asian spirituality at the seminary. On 18-27 1977 DLP hosted the WCC Consultation: "Dialogue in Community." The consultation resulted in the revision of the WCC preliminary guidelines on dialogue adopted in 1971 and the production of an official WCC policy statement on dialogue: "Guidelines on Dialogue" in 1979. DLP embodied many of the ideas advocated by the consultation.

In 1978 Seely returned to America with his wife who was unwell and DLP was temporarily closed. In 1979 Dr. Koson was forced to resign.⁴⁰ Most people believed that the Seelys' retirement and Koson's resignation marked the end of DLP. Dr. F. Victor McAnallen wrote: "The project has had little understanding and support from the CCT in general either before his [Dr. Koson] administration or during his administration. With the decision of the Seelys not to return to Thailand, most people

³⁸ Rev. Horace Ryburn to Rev. Francis Seely, 22 May 1974, DLP, PUA, Chiangmai.

³⁹ Rev. Francis Seely to Dr. Robert Thomas, 3 November 1975, DLP, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁴⁰ Rev. Koson Srisang was forced to resign after he petitioned the Thai government to intervene on the behalf of a group of students accused of communist insurgency. The church officers were deeply disturbed by Rev. Koson's action and feared that he may have jeopardised the church's politically neutral status. For details of publications by Koson see Introduction: I. C., "Recent Contributions by Thai Scholars."

have thought of it as deceased.”⁴¹ DLP had been responsible for organising the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures. After Seely’s departure no one stepped in to organise the lectures until 1990.

In 1984 Dr. John Butt returned to Thailand. He had previously worked as a short-term fraternal worker in Thailand between 1961-1963 and carried out post-graduate research in Thailand in 1971. Now his aim was to continue the inter-religious dialogue that Seely had started. During the 1980s he taught in the seminary and local church and worked towards his vision of an institute for religious studies. In 1990 he negotiated the merger of the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Fund and the Foundation for Inter-Religious Dialogue forming the Sinclair Thompson Fund for Inter-Religious Understanding. The monies from this fund were set aside for the establishment of an institute and in August 1998 the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture of Payap University was officially opened with John Butt as the Director. The Institute was responsible for the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures and the Francis Seely Faculty Seminar, annual seminars set up in remembrance of Seely. The Institute also arranged for Buddhist students from Mahamakut Buddhist University in Chiangmai and Christian students from the McGilvary Faculty of Theology of Payap University to meet together once a week to learn about each other’s faiths. John Butt recalled that initially the Christian students “were scared of monks and the monks were scared of the Christians. They were scared to speak out and when they did speak out they were aggressive.”⁴² John Butt explained that he was advocating:

Something entirely new to them [Thai Christian students], they have been completely indoctrinated with a different perspective, that Buddhism is evil, that it is the work of Satan...It seems to be a reversal of what in the past was condemning, destroying, converting and replacing religion rather than trying to understand.⁴³

⁴¹ Dr. F. Victor McAnallen to Dr. William Nottingham, 25 September 1980, DLP, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁴² Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁴³ Ibid.

He argued, "I am opening up a crack. They don't need to accept my view but they should be aware that there are other ways of looking at it [the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity]." ⁴⁴

John Butt has been criticised by both American and Thai Christians. Yoder, Dean of McGilvary Faculty of Theology, insisted that he supported inter-religious dialogue but did not want "to have this seminary turned into a school of religion." He argued: "It is a seminary, it is for the preparation of the ministers of the church and we cannot betray that responsibility." ⁴⁵ Collins, lecturer at McGilvary Faculty of Theology, contended that the Thai church regarded John Butt "with suspicion" because he insisted on pursuing something which they deem is "not helpful" and which "the community has already agreed they will not do." ⁴⁶

C. American Presbyterian Interpretations of Thai Buddhism

Paul Eakin and Wells published comparative analyses of Buddhism and Christianity shortly after the war. Eakin completed: *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand* in 1956. ⁴⁷ Wells addressed the issue at the second series of Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures in 1963, later published under the title: *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*. ⁴⁸ Eakin and Wells were interested in the study of classical Buddhism but elected to engage with popular Thai Buddhism, rather than classical Buddhism. Eakin insisted: "Most of the common people are ignorant of the literary, historical and philosophical aspects of Buddhism. Our chief interest must centre around the living ideas and practices of the masses." ⁴⁹ Eakin outlined the principal differences between classical Buddhism and popular Thai Buddhism. He argued that in classical Buddhism the consequences of an individual's actions, rather than the individual themselves, makes the transition from

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Rev. William Yoder, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁴⁶ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean. For a discussion of the Thai Christian response see Chapter Seven: 2. A., "A Christian Heritage and Theological Education."

⁴⁷ Bangkok: Church of Christ in Thailand, 1956.

⁴⁸ Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 2. (Bangkok: Kramol Tiranasar, 1963).

⁴⁹ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, 24.

one life to the next whereas in popular Thai Buddhism the individual soul is reincarnated in the next life. He argued that in classical Buddhism devotees hope to attain *nibbana* but in popular Thai Buddhism devotees have little hope of *nibbana*. Instead they hope to avoid hell, sojourn in heaven and attain a better quality of life in the next incarnation. He contended that while classical Buddhism recognises the spirits but does not engage with them, popular Thai Buddhism involves elaborate rituals intended to appease the spirits. Moreover, contra to the Buddha's teaching popular Thai Buddhists worship and pray to the Buddha as God.⁵⁰

Eakin and Wells discussed the similarities between Buddhism and Christianity. Eakin sketched the general similarities between the two religions contending that both religions arose in Asia, were reform movements within established religions, whose founders left no writings, resulted in organisations which were missionary, became state religions, suffered divisions, developed monasticism, underwent decline and became hierarchical and ritualistic. Wells explored the ideological similarities between the two religions arguing that both religions were concerned with moral and metaphysical questions, held that the world is temporal and life brief and sorrowful, and seek a way of deliverance that is other-worldly.⁵¹ Wells maintained that the "greatest area of mutual understanding is the field of ethics," contending that both religions recognise the existence of a transcendent moral law and exhort individuals to aspire to that moral ideal.⁵² Wells pointed out that achieving the moral ideal was not an end in itself but the means to achieve the goal, whether escape from the cycle of rebirth, as in Buddhism, or the restoration of the relationship between humanity and God, as in Christianity.

Eakin and Wells stressed the differences, rather than the similarities, between Buddhism and Christianity. Wells suggested that the two religions were "like the orchid and the rose, of two different species and incapable of blending to form one

⁵⁰ Ibid., 24-26.

⁵¹ Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*, 31.

⁵² Ibid., 43.

life-stream.”⁵³ He argued that Buddhism was a philosophy created by man and Christianity a revelation given by God, stating: “Many prominent Buddhists have asserted that Buddhism is not a religion at all, but a philosophy. Christianity is not a philosophy but a religious system based on faith in a personal God.”⁵⁴ Eakin also questioned whether Buddhism could be defined as a religion contending: “In its denial of a soul it [Buddhism] really places itself beyond the possibility of being called a religion.”⁵⁵

Despite acknowledging that Thai Buddhists worshiped spirits, God(s) and Buddha, Eakin and Wells both maintained that Buddhism was atheistic while Christianity was theistic. They believed that Thai Buddhists’ did not worship God despite the religious practices and rituals observed. Wells argued: “The God worshipped by Christians has no recognition in Theravada Buddhism.”⁵⁶ Wells believed that this was one of the fundamental differences between the two religions insisting that, “A syncretism of Buddhism and Christianity is not possible because they hold irreconcilable views of God.”⁵⁷

Wells argued that Christianity and Buddhism have radically different understandings of history. He described the Buddhist understanding of history as cyclical and the Christian as linear contending that in Buddhism an individual has no reference point but that in Christianity an individual, and the history of the world, “begins and ends in God.”⁵⁸ Eakin also questioned the significance given to the individual in Buddhism although for different reasons. He contended that in Buddhism the life of an individual has no ultimate value because it is impermanent and illusionary, while, in Christianity every individual is valued because of the belief in personal survival after death. Eakin explained that, in Christianity, rather than the life of an individual

⁵³ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁵ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, 1.

⁵⁶ Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*, 27.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

being determined by deeds of a previous existence every soul comes from God and in the right time moves to the next life.⁵⁹

Eakin addressed the different understandings of sin and salvation, arguing that for Buddhists, sin “is practically synonymous with existence” and salvation is escape from existence through enlightenment, achieved by oneself and for oneself.⁶⁰ By contrast, for Christians sin denotes a broken relationship between God and humanity and salvation the restoration of that relationship, achieved by Christ for humanity. Eakin explored the different understandings of merit contending that Buddhists make merit in order to be saved, but Christians make merit because they are already saved. Eakin concluded that, “Buddhism is self-centred. It makes the individual the centre and goal of all things.”⁶¹

Eakin and Wells compared the Buddhist and Christian understanding of suffering contending that the Buddhist perspective on life is inherently pessimistic while Christianity celebrates life. They drew attention to the Christian teaching that God is good, that the world, reflecting the character of God, was created good and was later corrupted by evil. Wells argued, “Christianity acknowledges the problem of suffering, but even more the problem of evil.”⁶² Grether offered a more sympathetic Christian interpretation of the Buddhist understanding of suffering in: “The Cross and the Bodhi Tree.”⁶³ He argued that two different, but not conflicting, understandings of suffering existed within Buddhism. The first, the normative view of suffering within Buddhism, maintains that to live is to suffer, that the cause of suffering is desire and that one may escape from suffering by extinguishing desire. The second, an alternative view of suffering within Buddhism, explores the idea of sacrificial suffering. Grether identified two examples of sacrificial suffering in the Buddha’s life: the first when he left his family to seek enlightenment; the second

⁵⁹ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, 33.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 38.

⁶² Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*, 25.

⁶³ *Theology Today* 16, no. 4 (1960): 446-458.

when he chose to remain with his followers after his enlightenment rather than go at once to nirvana. He insisted that the "motif of self-sacrifice recurs persistently in Buddhist teaching and tradition" and contended: "In this we have a motivation which Christians can understand and admire."⁶⁴ Grether argued that Buddhism and Christianity produced men and women who would suffer with courage and respond with compassion to those who were suffering. However, he argued that Buddhism, unlike Christianity, encouraged men and women to accept suffering fatalistically, exercise "compassion without passion" and ultimately to walk alone.⁶⁵ For Buddhist there is "a temptation often irresistible: namely to remain upon the mountain, gazing sorrowless upon the sorrowing crowd below."⁶⁶

Seely rejected Eakin and Wells' formal comparisons of Buddhism and Christianity arguing that they compared similar words, concepts and ideas in the two religions without considering the role that those beliefs played in the religion. Seely argued that it was more productive to make a functional rather than a formal comparison of the two religions, one that compared aspects of the two religions that are related functionally. He maintained that it was unproductive to compare the Buddhist and Christian understanding of God because the concept of God did not play the same role in Buddhism as it did in Christianity. He argued that instead of comparing the Buddhist and Christian teaching about God the Christian teaching about God should be compared with the Buddhist teaching about *kamma*, *dhamma*, Buddha and *nibbana*. He believed that certain Buddhist concepts, including *kamma*, *dhamma*, the Buddha and *nibbana*, play a similar role in Buddhism to 'God' in Christianity. In a similar way he argued: the Buddhist teaching about the Four Noble Truths should be compared with the Christian teaching about human nature, suffering, original sin, ethics, prayer and meditation; the Buddha's experience under the Bodhi tree should be compared with the baptism of Jesus; and the cross of Jesus compared with Buddha's initial act of renunciation and years of living for others. Seely argued:

⁶⁴ Ibid., 451.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 457.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 458.

It is my theory that a careful study of a great amount of material which is related functionally will throw quite a different light on the relation between the two religions than that which we now have. This functional comparison of the two religions is a bit like comparing two jigsaw puzzles to see if the completed pictures are the same or not. To compare the shape is irrelevant.⁶⁷

3. An Increasing Involvement in Thai Buddhist Culture

Before the war American Presbyterian missionaries insisted that converts to Christianity cut themselves off from Thai Buddhist culture. Consequently the Thai church developed as a sub-culture, or ghetto culture, within the wider society.

Maitree Charburut, a Young Turk, wrote: "Thai Christians are like a half breed... they can neither mix with the missionaries nor with the Buddhists and they always feel that they are not truly part of Thai society."⁶⁸ After the war foreign missionaries and Thai Christians began to reevaluate the relationship between the Thai church and Thai Buddhist culture. However, attitudes and behaviour patterns changed very slowly. Rev. Thomas Duggan, who began his career as an American Presbyterian fraternal worker in 1959, recalled: "When I first arrived here pastors reflected pre-WWII theology, very separatist, they would not even visit a *wat*."⁶⁹ In the 1990s Dr. Maen contended: "For the majority of the Thai church evangelism, conversion and separation are central, like black and white, Christianity is white and Buddhism is black."⁷⁰

Throughout the post-war period American Presbyterians, especially those who had shown a particular interest in Thai Buddhism, began to participate more fully in Thai Buddhist culture and encouraged Thai Christians to do the same. They visited Buddhist temples, spent time with Buddhist monks and participated in Buddhist ceremonies. There was no consensus about, nor guidance on, what aspects of Thai Buddhist culture Christians could participate in. Individuals were guided by their own conscience.

⁶⁷ Seely, "Thai Buddhism and the Christian Faith," 139-140.

⁶⁸ Maitree Charburut, "Missionaries and the Church of Christ in Thailand," 1964, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁶⁹ Rev. Tom Duggan, interview by Patricia McLean, 12 November 1998, Bangkok, tape recording.

⁷⁰ Dr. Maen Pongudom, interview by Patricia McLean.

A. Interviews

The thesis will now explore the data generated in individual interviews with American Presbyterian missionaries in order to appreciate contemporary understandings of and attitudes toward Thai Buddhism.

The American Presbyterians interviewed by the researcher displayed a wide range of opinions on Christian involvement in Thai Buddhist culture. Two interviewees (22 percent), John Butt and Scott Satterfield, argued that Christians could participate fully in Buddhist culture. Satterfield married a Thai Buddhist woman in a Thai Buddhist wedding festival. He insisted that a Christian may participate in every aspect of Thai Buddhist culture “as long as that person is strong and secure in their faith.”⁷¹ Both John Butt and Satterfield would willingly bow down to Buddhist images, believing that in doing so they “are not worshipping an image but paying respects to what that image represents.”⁷² The other seven interviewees (77 percent) rejected this interpretation of bowing down to a Buddhist image, arguing that they would not bow to an image or encourage other Christians to bow to an image. Yoder said: “It would offend me to see a Christian getting down and kowtowing a Buddha image, that would offend me as a Christian.”⁷³ Yoder insisted that Christians should not pay respects to, or *wai*, a Buddhist image or spirit house, or placate the spirits in anyway. However, Yoder would willingly *wai* the body of the deceased at a funeral, interpreting this as a way of showing respect to the deceased as distinct from worshipping the spirit of the deceased.

Collins spoke about how Christians should behave at the temple. He believed that it was appropriate for Thai Christians to *wai* during the Buddhist ceremony but said that he would not do so himself, not because he was a Christian but because he was a foreigner: “It would almost be disrespectful or hypocritical to act like a Thai in that situation. I would like to act like a Thai in some situations but not that one because

⁷¹ Scott Satterfield, interview by Patricia McLean, 26 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁷² Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁷³ Rev. William Yoder, interview by Patricia McLean.

they know that I am not, and never have been, a Buddhist.”⁷⁴ Of all the interviewees Dr. Esther Wakeman was the most unwilling to actively participate in Buddhist occasions. She believed that participating in Buddhist ceremonies was like “flirting with someone who isn’t your partner, it gives that other person who isn’t your partner permission to flirt back.”⁷⁵ In the analogy Wakeman implies that the ‘other person’ is the demonic spiritual force(s) that she implicitly identifies with Thai Buddhism.

4. An Increasing Awareness of how Buddhism might Contribute to Thai Christianity

Before the war American Presbyterian missionaries set out to displace Thai Buddhist culture with American Christianity. They did not believe that Thai Buddhism had anything to contribute to Thai Christianity. After the war American Presbyterian missionaries became increasingly interested in what Thai Buddhism could contribute to Thai Christianity. Initially they sought to adapt what they regarded as cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in order to make Thai Christianity more authentically Thai. By the 1960s Seely and others were beginning to ask what contribution explicitly religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture might make to Thai Christianity. In 1965 Seely sent a paper to John Hamlin entitled, ‘Some Suggestions for Creative Christian Contact with Buddhists’ in which he argued:

Christianity is our faith, our way of life, and as such we believe there is something in it for others including Buddhists. But since we are not omniscient we should be open to the possibility that God may have something for us, a word to us, in the way of life of the Buddhists.⁷⁶

Dr. Donald Swearer, a short-term American Presbyterian fraternal worker in Thailand between 1957-1960, was in full agreement with Seely. In 1960 Swearer returned to America to pursue an academic career in religious studies. In 1973 Seely invited Swearer to give the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures. During the lecture Swearer confessed: “My study of Buddhism has caused me to reconsider my

⁷⁴ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁷⁵ Dr. Esther Wakeman, interview by Patricia McLean, 30 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁷⁶ Rev. Francis Seely, “Some Suggestions for Creative Christian Contact with Buddhists,” 1 June 1965 (paper submitted to Dr. John Hamlin), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

Christian faith in a new light. Indeed it is not overstating the case to say that Buddhism has enlarged and deepened my own faith.”⁷⁷ Swearer insisted that he was not advocating a syncretism of Christian and Buddhist views but a new appreciation of one’s own faith through an encounter with another faith.⁷⁸

Meanwhile a few fraternal workers in CCT were beginning to realise that although Thai Christians appeared to have withdrawn from Thai Buddhist culture, and were opposed to appropriating aspects of that culture in the Thai church, their Christian faith was nonetheless influenced by Buddhism. Koyama, a fraternal worker from Japan working in the Thailand Theological Seminary, composed an open letter to Rev. Daniel McGilvary, asking how he made the Christian message real to the Thai who were conceptually far removed from Western Christians, and who adapted the Christian message in light of their Buddhist presuppositions irrespective of what the missionaries taught, seasoning the Christian message with Buddhist salt: “When I peep into the kitchen of their theology, I realise that the seasoning is done quite unintentionally, and semi-automatically.”⁷⁹ Koyama argued that, “In the Thai Christian church, syncretism chiefly takes the form of unintentional chronic Asokanization of the Gospel, which is perhaps more insidious than open syncretism. An Asokanized Christ is a ‘dim’ Christ, tamed by culture.”⁸⁰

A. Interviews

All the interviewees were in favour of the Thai church utilising aspects of the Thai Buddhist culture, although Collins questioned the relevance of some practices remarking: “Things are changing so fast that to do things in the traditional way makes less sense all the time.”⁸¹ Collins’ remark demonstrates an appreciation of the

⁷⁷ Donald K. Swearer, *A Theology of Dialogue, Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures, Series No. 8* (Bangkok: The Church of Christ in Thailand, 1973), i.

⁷⁸ Swearer, *A Theology of Dialogue*, 3.

⁷⁹ Koyama, “Aristotelian Pepper and Buddhist Salt,” 99.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 100. Asoka was a great Buddhist king in India (c.268-239BC). He was instrumental in strengthening and spreading Buddhism, contributing eventually to its strong pervasiveness in Thailand. Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 75-77.

⁸¹ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

non-static nature of culture, that all cultures are in a constant state of flux responding to creative initiatives from within as well as innovative ideas from outside. None of the interviewees were able to confidently distinguish between cultural and religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture. Yoder admitted: "I am never quite sure what is cultural and what is religious. They are probably so closely related you can't really know."⁸² John Butt was the only interviewee who spoke about how Buddhist beliefs had enhanced his own understanding of his Christian faith. He insisted that his understanding of God, humanity, sin and salvation had all been broadened through an engagement with the Buddhist teaching.⁸³ Four interviewees (44 percent) believed that whatever attitude foreign Christians take to Thai Buddhist culture, Thai Christians would invariably appropriate aspects of Thai Buddhism in Thai Christianity. Thus Martha Butt observed: "The people are Thai, the Thai culture is already part of them and the Thai culture is already part of their beliefs and practices."⁸⁴ Duggan remarked that it is relatively easy to break with behavioural acts but much harder to relinquish "fundamental deep beliefs."⁸⁵ Duggan and Collins both insisted that the Buddhist doctrine of *kamma* significantly influences Thai Christianity. Duggan spoke about the Christian and Buddhist practices of giving to the church, musing: "I have a feeling that even third and fourth-generation Thai Christians are much more responsible for raising funds for a specific fund than for a church budget. I think it is related to *kamma* but I can't prove it."⁸⁶ Collins talked about the Christian practice of donating pews to the church, he said:

Many Christians believe that, 'If I get it right, if I do right, I will gain, God will favour me'...I doubt they think that they will get into heaven, although there might be a few who think that. I am almost sure that in the instance of these pews it was a means to ensure that they gained God's favour.⁸⁷

Dugan and Collins comments disclose a suspicion that the Thai Buddhist teaching about *kamma* influences the Christian practice of alms giving in the Thai church. In

⁸² Rev. William Yoder, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁸³ Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁸⁴ Martha Butt, interview by Patricia McLean, 20 April 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁸⁵ Rev. Tom Duggan, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

that Thai Christians believe that alms giving in the church, like alms giving at the temple, will be rewarded.

5. An Increasing Awareness of the Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Culture

Before the war most American Presbyterian missionaries did not distinguish between culture and religion, considering them to be indistinguishable from one another. They considered Thai Buddhist culture to be, at best, outwith the presence of God, at worst, demonic. The Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Laos Mission wrote:

It is questionable whether there is another country in the world where an anti-Christian faith has so completely taken possession of its adherents, body, mind and soul, as in Siam; and whether any other religion has so successfully resisted the influence of Christian teaching as has Buddhism in its Southern form.⁸⁸

After the war the missionaries' attitude towards Thai Buddhist culture began to change. Eakin suggested that the spiritual awakening occurring throughout Thailand after the war, evidenced by an increased interest in all things spiritual, might be "due to the brooding presence of the Spirit of Truth ever leading men (*sic*) out of darkness into the light?"⁸⁹ Eakin and others began to talk about Thai Buddhism as the precursor to, and preparation for, Christianity, reflecting 'fulfilment theology'.⁹⁰ Eakin reasoned that "a thorough study of the doctrine of *karma* leads one to see that he is here dealing with incompleteness rather than absolute falsehood – an incompleteness that finds its fulfilment in Christ."⁹¹ However, Eakin did not suggest that Buddhism was for the Thai what Judaism was for Christians. John Hamlin, arguably one of the most theologically articulate of the American Presbyterians, expounded on the blessing of God in Genesis 9. He contended that God's blessing

⁸⁸ Rev. A.W. Cooper, Report to the Board of Foreign Mission, 21 September 1912, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁸⁹ Eakin, "A Wheel within the Wheel of the Law in Siam," 447.

⁹⁰ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, 61.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

had been given to all the nations and had never been revoked. The blessing consisted of the revelation of God, and religion was humanity's response to divine revelation. He asked: "What has Buddhism done with the 'truth of God' which He (*sic*) was disclosing and is disclosing to men (*sic*)?"⁹² Seely was alone in equating the revelation of God in Buddhism and Christianity, contending that God was revealed in Buddhism as fully as God was revealed in Christianity. Seely rejected the uniqueness of Christ arguing that, "Jesus Christ is one particular instance repeated in its essentials in many forms, places and times."⁹³

A. Interviews

One interviewee, John Butt, agreed with Seely's theological position, asserting that the revelation of God in Buddhism is equal to that in Christianity and dismissing the uniqueness of Christ. John Butt maintained: "Both [Christ and Buddha] were inspired by an experience of the transcendent God, what Christians would call God, ultimate reality, ultimate truth – that revelation, in both cases, is imperfect."⁹⁴ He insisted that Buddha gives Buddhists "a view that corresponds with and is comparable to what the Christian sees in Christ."⁹⁵ The other eight interviewees (88 percent) affirmed the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture but did not equate it with the revelation of God in Christianity, insisting on the uniqueness of Christ. Four interviewees (44 percent) spoke about the positive aspects of Thai Buddhist culture, contending that these evidence the presence of God among Thai Buddhists. Duggan said:

Wherever goodness and love and mercy and justice are being enacted, that is where God is active. I don't think we bring God with us, I think we come as missionaries to discover what God has been doing and it is in these basic elements of love, peace, justice and reconciliation that I would say we must look for the presence of God.⁹⁶

⁹² Dr. John Hamlin, "Remarks on Some Aspects of the Christian View of Buddhism," 16 January 1959, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹³ Rev. Francis Seely, "A Preliminary Draft of a Statement to the Presbytery," November 1957, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹⁴ Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Rev. Tom Duggan, interview by Patricia McLean.

6. An Increasing Conviction that Thai Buddhists may be Saved

Before the war most American Presbyterian missionaries believed that Buddhists would go to hell and would not hesitate to tell Buddhists, including Buddhists priests, that they would spend eternity in hell if they did not convert to Christianity.⁹⁷ Two men, however, challenged that dominant understanding. Rev. Evander McGilvary believed that it was possible for a person to be saved without a knowledge of Christ, that non-Christians would not be eternally lost and that Buddhism and Christianity were equal channels of salvations. Evander McGilvary resigned of his own volition, believing that it was no longer possible for him to serve as a missionary.⁹⁸ After his resignation the Laos Mission asked BFM “To appoint only those men whose views are known to accord with the general assembly and the great body of the church at large.”⁹⁹ Dr. C. C. Hansen was not re-appointed to Thailand after BFM received a letter from Rev. Roderick Gillies, which stated:

One has often wondered whether Dr. Hansen is a Christian or a Buddhist or something else...he has persistently extolled Buddhism and left a very misleading impression. He has never done anything directly in evangelistic work, and I rather think the fact of conversion in an evangelical sense has no place in his view of things at all.¹⁰⁰

After the war opinions began to change. Those who believed that Buddhists would go to hell no longer proclaimed it as confidently or as loudly as they had done previously. There are no references in the archives to “dying people” and “perishing heathen” common in earlier literature. However, those who were beginning to consider the possibility that Buddhists might be saved were, for the most part, also reluctant to voice their opinions. Hamlin commented that “he would not be surprised” to see Buddhists in heaven, supported Seely and recruited other like-

⁹⁷ Mrs. George McFarland, “The Church in Siam,” n.d., (paper presented at the PCUSA Board Field Representatives Staff Seminar, 25 April – 9 May 1958), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹⁸ Members of the Laos Mission to Dr. Daniel McGilvary, 15 May 1894, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

⁹⁹ Members of the Laos Mission to the Board of Foreign Mission, 17 June 1894, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁰⁰ Rev. Roderick Gillies to the Board of Foreign Mission, 8 October 1909, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

mindful faculty members but did not publicly own the belief that Buddhists could be saved.¹⁰¹ Seely was one of the few who openly stated that Buddhists could be saved. Seely insisted that it was essential that all who desired to engage with people of other faiths accepted the “possibility of God’s working creatively through faiths other than the Christian faith, even perhaps cleansing Christians through the medium of other faiths.”¹⁰² Seely himself believed that “the cross was one act of a myriad of redemptive acts.”¹⁰³

A. Interviews

Four interviewees (44 percent) believed that at least the majority, if not all, Thai Buddhists would be saved. Reflecting this view Satterfield argued: “It seems inconceivable that Jesus would be the only means of meeting God. If that were true, God would be an exclusivist God and that contradicts the idea of creation: why create people who will be excluded?”¹⁰⁴ Duggan contended that the traditional understanding that God condemns all Buddhists was “not theologically satisfying” and “does not make Biblical or theological sense.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly Guyer admitted: “Frankly I couldn’t cope with thinking that all the Buddhist people I know were going to hell as the churches in the States would want me to say. I would go insane.”¹⁰⁶ Four interviewees (44 percent) believed that some Buddhists would be saved but insisted that this did not mean that all Buddhists, or even a majority, would be saved. Collins said: “It is hard to think that God does not have mercy on them because of our stupidity in communicating so poorly to them.”¹⁰⁷ Only one interviewee (11 percent), Wakeman, believed that Buddhists would only be saved if they heard about and responded to Christ. She did, however, believe that Buddhists

¹⁰¹ Rev. Dr. John Hamlin, interview by Patricia McLean

¹⁰² Rev. Francis Seely, “Some Suggestions for Creative Christian Contact with Buddhists,” 1 June 1965 (paper submitted to Dr. John Hamlin), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Scott Satterfield, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰⁵ Rev. Tom Duggan, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰⁶ Rev. Janet Guyer, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰⁷ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

might have the opportunity to respond to God after death referring to 1 Peter 3:19 when Jesus preached to the spirits.

7. The Acculturation of Christianity in Thai Buddhist Culture

American Presbyterian missionaries, meeting to discuss the future of APM in Thailand during the war, agreed that they needed to develop a different attitude and approach to Thai Buddhist culture on return to Thailand. They argued that their earlier negative attitudes needed to be revised toward a more positive, affirmative approach. Eakin insisted: "If there is any thought in the mind of the missionary that the Thai language and culture is inferior and not worth bothering about, the Thai will know and the influence of the missionary will not amount to much."¹⁰⁸ The consultation contended that missionaries would need to develop new ways of acculturating Christianity in Thai Buddhists culture and recommended that during the war missionaries hoping to return to Thailand should "turn their attention to developing certain skills as a method of making a new approach" to Thai Buddhists.¹⁰⁹

Once they returned to Thailand the American Presbyterian missionaries set about developing a Christian interpretation of Thai Buddhism upon which to base a new approach to Thai Buddhists.¹¹⁰ In the early post-war period the missionaries emphasised the irreconcilable differences, rather than the similarities, between Buddhism and Christianity. Rather than explore how Buddhist concepts and terminology might be used to communicate the Gospel more effectively to Thai Buddhists, the missionaries advocated an approach that minimised aspects of

¹⁰⁸ Rev. Paul A. Eakin, "Anticipations of Post-War Thailand" (paper presented at the meeting to discuss the APM in Thailand, 12 March 1943), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the Thailand Consultative Conference, 18-20 October 1944, APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

¹¹⁰ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*; Wells, *Theravada Buddhism and Protestant Christianity*; idem, *The Teachings of Buddha and Christ*, new tract published in 1951 reported in Report of the Committee on Christian Literature and Literacy (report presented at the Planning Conference, 31 May 1952 – 7 June 1952), APM, PUA, Chiangmai; idem, Lecture on Buddhism, announced in Rev. Horace Ryburn to Missionaries in Bangkok, 21 April 1954, APM, PUA, Chiangmai; and Grether, "The Cross and the Bodhi Tree."

Christianity that were offensive or meaningless to Thai Buddhists and maximised aspects that were attractive to Thai Buddhists. Eakin recommended that missionaries did not talk about sin. He said: "I do not recall that a single Thai Christian has told me that it was devotion to Christ or a deep sense of sin that brought him (*sic*) to Christianity. These have been later developments."¹¹¹ Eakin recommended that missionaries should emphasise rather the Christian teaching about the creator God and salvation, on the grounds that Thai Buddhists wanted to be saved, not from sin, but from an "endless round of rebirths."¹¹² Eakin believed that the basic Christian doctrines about God, sin and salvation had to be taught after, not before, conversion, contending: "It has been found that when dealing with students with a strong Buddhist background, the best method is to deal with them over a long period of years."¹¹³

Grether and Seely pioneered a new approach to evangelising Thai Buddhists while engaged in translating the Bible into Thai. They were seconded part-time to the American Bible Society to help produce a new Thai translation of the Old and New Testament based on the Hebrew and Greek. Through this work they developed the idea that Thai and Pali religious terms should be employed in the translation in order to communicate effectively to Thai Buddhists. On the grounds, as they argued, that God has self-revealed in Buddhism it follows that Christian truths could be communicated through Buddhist terms. However, both Grether and Seely recognised the potential difficulties of their position. In an article reviewing the problems they were facing translating the scriptures into Thai, Seely wrote:

It is often impossible or unwise to use a religiously neutral word to convey Christian meanings, and yet to use a term packed with Buddhist connotations in order to convey a Christian meaning may fall short of its objective and may even cause antagonism in the Buddhist mind.¹¹⁴

Discussing the use of the terms *pit* and *baab* for example Seely explained that while they are used interchangeably in Christian circles to translate the term 'sin,' they

¹¹¹ Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*, 62.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Seely, "Some Problems in Translating the Scriptures in Thai," 49.

have quite different meanings in the Buddhist context: “*pit* implies something wrong, erroneous, mistaken, false and incorrect, while *baab* refers to sin, wickedness and vice.”¹¹⁵ Seely contended that the term *baab* was a more appropriate translation for the Christian concept of sin but pointed out that it meant quite different things to Buddhists and Christians. Christians used the term to refer to an act against God, while Buddhists used the term to refer to an act against an impersonal *dhamma*.

The translation committee considered using the Thai term *tham* (Pali: *dhamma*, Sanskrit *dharma*) to translate the term ‘the Word’ in John 1. Seely was in favour of using the term but the committee decided to use a more religiously neutral word. Dr. Maen argued that if the missionaries had been willing to use the term *tham* to translate ‘the Word,’ it would have enabled them “to make the non-historical, non-personal, lifeless *Dharma* a historical, personal, living *Dharma*; like the early church apologists made non-personal, trans-historical Greek *logos* a personal, historical Christian *Logos* – Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁶ The committee also explored the use of the Thai term *kam* (Pali: *kamma*, Sanskrit *karma*) to translate the word ‘guilt,’ intending to communicate the sense of having accumulated ill-fate. This translation was also rejected in favour of the less controversial term *mee kwam pit*, literally “to have wrong.”

Grether remained a staunch advocate of Christian evangelism and conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, whereas Seely became increasingly interested in “contact with Buddhists” rather than “ministry to Buddhists.”¹¹⁷ Seely’s theological position was adopted by the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture. Although John Butt, unlike Seely, still used the terms ‘evangelism’ and ‘conversion,’ he radically re-

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁶ Maen Pongudom, “Apologetic and Missionary Proclamation: Exemplified by American Presbyterian Missionaries to Thailand (1828-1978), Early Church Apologists: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and the Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai Buddhist Monk-Apologist” (Ph.D., University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 1979), 151.

¹¹⁷ Rev. Francis Seely, “Some Suggestions for Creative Christian Contact with Buddhists,” 1 June 1965 (paper submitted to Dr. John Hamlin), APM, PUA, Chiangmai.

interpreted them to reflect an understanding of Christianity and Buddhism that was similar to Seely's. He understands evangelism to be the means of drawing people closer to God and conversion to be the "means of becoming more Christ-like."¹¹⁸ He insisted that becoming more Christ-like "does not exclude and in some ways it may actually correspond with becoming more Buddha-like as well."¹¹⁹

A. Interviews

Satterfield and Martha Butt expressed understandings of evangelism and conversion that were similar to John Butt's. The other six interviewees (66 percent), however, affirmed the importance of conversion from Buddhism to Christianity and spoke about how they would communicate their Christian faith to a Thai Buddhist. Guyer and Dobson recommended that the best approach was to relate to the particular needs of an individual. Thus Guyer commented: "I would hope that I would talk to the individual as an individual according to what their needs and questions were at the time."¹²⁰ Neither Guyer nor Dobson would attempt to use Buddhist religious terms to explain Christianity to a Buddhist or compare Christianity with Buddhism. Dobson insisted that, "to raise the issue of Buddhism negatively and to present it in any context in a negative light invites hostility and rejection of Christianity as a whole."¹²¹ Dobson maintained that the best way "is simply and consistently to demonstrate the alternative."¹²² Collins and Wakeman offered examples how they would communicate their Christian faith using Buddhist terms and ideas. Collins said that he would talk about Jesus as the one who deals with *kamma*,¹²³ while Wakeman said that she would describe God as the most powerful spirit.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Dr. John Butt, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Rev. Janet Guyer, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹²¹ Rev. Kenneth Dobson, interview by Patricia McLean, 16 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Rev. Robert Collins, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹²⁴ Dr. Esther Wakeman, interview by Patricia McLean.

8. Conclusion

The evidence reveals that after the war the American Presbyterians were strongly encouraged to develop a more irenic, explorative approach to Thai Buddhist culture than had been the case before the war. Initially this decision was prompted by the view that the missionaries' negative attitudes towards Thai Buddhism and lack of understanding of Thai Buddhism were in part responsible for the slow growth of the church. However, the wisdom of the decision was confirmed by a growing appreciation of the benefits of studying Thai Buddhism. American Presbyterians were increasingly encouraged to study Thai Buddhism in order to promote better relationships between Buddhists and Christians, to encourage common social action and to enhance Thai Christians' and American Presbyterians' understanding of Buddhism and Christianity.

BFM's decision to encourage missionaries to study Thai Buddhism resulted in a diversity of theological appraisals of Thai Buddhism. These ranged from an appreciation of the sincerity of Thai Buddhist spirituality, espoused by the majority of American Presbyterians, to an affirmation of Thai Buddhism as an efficient means of salvation for its devout practitioners, espoused by individual American Presbyterians, specifically Seely and Butt. Neither APM nor PCUSA/UPC insisted that their members avow a particular theological position. Seely was persuaded to remain an ordained member of PCUSA/UPC and to carry on working in CCT despite his own concerns that he could no longer affirm his ordination vows. Seely's and Butt's interest in Thai Buddhism was commended by, and given the financial support of, the American Presbyterian church.

These attitudes toward the Gospel and other faiths reflects currents of contemporary Christian thinking, particularly that of WCC. DLP, under Seely's leadership, had the privilege of hosting the WCC consultation, "Dialogue in Community" in 1977 that resulted in the formulation of the WCC guidelines on dialogue. However, this thinking found mixed reactions among Thai Christians. In Part Three it will be shown that despite Seely's and Butt's endorsement of dialogue most Thai Christians

were critical of, and unwilling to participate in, the projects initiated by DLP and the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture.

Chapter Six: The Overseas Missionary Fellowship Missionaries' Approach to Thai Buddhism in Central Thailand

1. Introduction

Within the historical framework of OMF presented in Chapter Four this chapter will explore the OMF missionaries' approach to Thai Buddhism in Central Thailand. It will assess their interest in Thai Buddhism, what initiatives were taken to understand Thai Buddhism and what attitudes displayed toward Thai Buddhism. The chapter will argue that OMF missionaries arrived in Thailand with an inadequate understanding of Thai Buddhism and that although their grasp of the Thai language improved, their understanding of Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism remained poor. The chapter will demonstrate that their interest in Thai Buddhism was wholly pragmatic, prompted by a desire to communicate the Gospel to Thai Buddhists. The chapter will illustrate OMF missionaries' negative attitudes toward Thai Buddhism and contend that those attitudes are directly related to their theological presuppositions, reflecting the thinking of the world-wide evangelical movement.

2. An Ongoing Reluctance to Engage with Thai Buddhism

CIM missionaries, arriving in Thailand from China, were confronted with an altogether different religious milieu to that they had grown accustomed to in China. Reporting on the 'new fields' Lea wrote:

Many a missionary has remarked that the darkness in these areas is deeper than it ever was in China, superstition more binding, idolatry more widely evident. Mohamedism (*sic*) and Buddhism more firmly entrenched, tribal fears and evil practices more prevalent, hearts and minds bland and uninterested in the gospel message.¹

New missionaries, who had had the opportunity to study Buddhism in the West, discovered that there was little in common between what they had been taught and

¹ Arnold J. Lea, Minutes of the Overseas Council, 14 April 1953, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

Thai Buddhism. Bell recalled: "We had the course from London University....but it bore no relationship, theoretical Buddhism bore no relationship to what we were seeing out there."² OMF missionaries arriving in Central Thailand during the early 1950s, from China and the West, were without both senior missionaries with experience working in Thailand and Thai Christian colleagues to advise them. Their orientation to Thai Buddhist culture was dependent on an accumulation of their own experiences, a few source materials and occasional visiting speakers.³

In June 1953 Field Council discussed the orientation of new workers. "It was suggested that new workers could use more orientation in the matter of the approach to the Thai and to Buddhism."⁴ Shortly after Faulkner wrote to all missionaries asking, "Will you please gather material on methods of approaching the Thai and what you are learning of Buddhism, Thai customs and courtesy in order to aid our discussions."⁵ The missionary body met to consider these matters at Field Conference in October 1954. During the course of the meeting Beugler "offered to make a digest of literature on Buddhism which could be duplicated and circulated to the stations."⁶ Beugler produced a paper, *The Religion of the Thai in Central Thailand*. She contended:

We as Christian missionaries must realise that we are not dealing with a decaying, obsolete, religious system with low ethical value. A high moral code, humanised by tolerance, kindness and gentleness; an amazing scientific, psychological and philosophical body of teaching which learned young Thai, educated abroad, are interpreting in modern terms... We, as those who come as guests to this land to introduce the Lord Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and

² Rowland Bell, interview by Patricia McLean.

³ Those included: Wells, *Thai Buddhism: Its Rites and Activities* and Eakin, *Buddhism and the Christian Approach to Buddhists in Thailand*. Dr. Kenneth Wells and Pastor Boonmee, of CCT, were invited to address OMF missionaries at the Central Thailand Field Conference in November 1964. See Chapter Six: 7., "The Acculturation of Christianity in Thai Buddhist Culture."

⁴ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 2-4 June 1953, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵ Cyril Faulkner to OMF missionaries in Central Thailand, 18 June 1953, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁶ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 19-22 October 1954, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

the life, must understand in what these people trust. Whether they be illiterate country people, well-educated officials, or town people, young or old, we must sit where they sit and evaluate the good as well as the bad. Our own lives must show by love, goodness and strength that we have a better way, otherwise our message will fail to interest them.⁷

Notwithstanding such initial efforts to understand Thai Buddhism the evidence indicates that OMF missionaries remained largely ill informed about Thai Buddhism and did not receive adequate cultural orientation or instruction in Thai Buddhism. Molly Prasert arrived in Thailand in 1960. She recalled studying comparative religions at OMF International Headquarters in Singapore but said, "It meant nothing to me at all, two kinds of Buddhism and that kind of thing, funny names, we had very little insight into Buddhism, it was very difficult. We developed no empathy, it was fact only, not attitude."⁸ At Overseas Council in 1964 Heimbach reported that few OMF missionaries in Thailand understand the Thai context well enough to evangelise effectively. He argued that it was essential for missionaries to have a much greater understanding about Thai religious beliefs.⁹

Throughout the 1960s OMF was becoming increasingly aware that its language and orientation program was inadequate and endeavoured to rectify that. In 1964 Dorothy Mainhood and Mary Cooke, who were responsible for the language and orientation program, started to produce a journal, *Lingo*. Cooke recalled, "The purpose was to give missionaries insight into linguistics and culture and missiology."¹⁰ Others remarked, "In the good old days we had some articles in a book. People like Mary Cooke collected articles on Thai religion, culture and what you should not do in Thailand."¹¹ In 1965 OMF decided that all new missionaries would spend one year at the Union Language School (ULS) in Bangkok before beginning work up-country.

⁷ Dorothy Beugler, *The Religion of the Thai in Central Thailand*, unpublished typescript, n.d., 1.

⁸ Molly Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean, 6 June 1998, Chiangmai, tape recording.

⁹ Heimbach, Minutes of the Overseas Council, 3 October 1964, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹⁰ Mary Cooke, interview by Patricia McLean, 30 June 1998, Chiangmai, tape recording.

¹¹ Focus Group Number 5, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean, 29 October 1998, Hangnaam, Chainat, tape recording.

Shortly after ULS's language courses were revised by Don Larson, from the Bible Society, leading to the inclusion of a number of new language modules including one on religious communication. Mainhood's, Cooke's and Larsons' initiatives reflect the increasing interest in culture, and the relationship between culture and Gospel, evident among evangelicals at this time.

However, the lack of adequate training was not easily rectified. At Overseas Council in March 1969 Griffiths reflected:

If language has been poor then acculturation has often been poorer still. Library and research facilities are minimal in so many fields. Because even our senior missionaries have been learners in the fields, there has not always been possible that wonderful passing on of experience...How many of us are really knowledgeable about Buddhism and Islam?¹²

In 1975 Griffiths reported to Overseas Council, "We still hear new missionaries complaining that they are not being taught anything about the new culture by older missionaries, and even hinting darkly that this may be because their seniors have never understood the culture anyway!"¹³ He argued:

I would think that the grasp of national culture on the whole by most is at a superficial level and rather limited...Some missionaries are suspicious of literature, plays, national songs and music for fear of compromise and involvement with immorality, [thus] non-involvement is excused by saying 'if in doubt, don't.' This 'spiritual' resistance is a confusion between the necessity of understanding culture, without necessarily conforming to it.¹⁴

Although compulsory attendance at ULC meant that language training improved, orientation to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism remained poor. In 1981 Murray reported to Overseas Council, "In recent years it does seem that although the language courses have improved, the study of anthropology as it relates to mission

¹² Michael C. Griffiths, "An Interdenominational Missionary Society in Tomorrow's World" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 22 March 1969), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹³ Michael C. Griffiths, "Improving Cultural Appreciation" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 27 September to 8 October 1975), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹⁴ Ibid.

work has weakened.”¹⁵ Roberts, who was Superintendent in Central Thailand at the time, said, “Our weakness has always been that because we are strong on language it dominates to the weakness of the other. There is a constant tension and a constant tendency to be strong on language and weak on orientation.”¹⁶ This relates to the world-wide evangelical movement’s tendency to prioritise language and cultural studies over religious studies. Languages and cultures are deemed to contain positive/neutral elements that may be utilised in the inculturation process. Non-Christian religions are considered to be in conflict with, and in need of replacement by, the Gospel.

In 1985 *Lingo* ceased publication due to a shortage of personnel. In 1990 OMF moved out of ULS and established a separated language and orientation training centre in Lopburi, Lopburi Language Centre (LLC). Brenda Noble was responsible for the program at the time of interview. Asked what instruction in Thai Buddhism new missionaries receive she replied,

That is an area that still needs to be worked on, bits and pieces they will get through aspects of the housing lecture and the lecture on Thai spirit beliefs, another lecture I really want to do is funerals and weddings...Beyond that the theoretical basis is covered more in the language program.¹⁷

In the language program there is one compulsory module on Christian communication. This is designed to enable missionaries to give their own testimony in Thai, explain why they came to Thailand, and teaches them what to say to someone who has never heard the Gospel. There are also two optional modules, one on religious communication that offers a critical comparison of Christianity and Buddhism, and one comprised of Pastor Wan’s lectures on Thai Buddhism. One focus group participant volunteered, “I have not done any particular Buddhist modules and I am almost done, so none are required.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Ian Murray, “Advance in the 1980s: Policy on Church Planting” (paper presented at Overseas Council, 12-25 September 1981), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹⁶ Ian Roberts, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁷ Brenda Noble, interview by Patricia McLean, 1 June 1999, Lopburi, tape recording.

¹⁸ Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean, 28 October 1998, Hangnaam, Chainat, tape recording.

A. Interviews and Focus Groups

During the course of the focus groups it became evident that it was junior missionaries, who had been in Thailand for less than one year, and not the more senior missionaries, who believed that it was important to have an adequate understanding of Thai Buddhism. One junior missionary argued, "You can't understand the people of Thailand unless you understand the religion of Thailand because it is all intertwined: culture, religion and the way people think."¹⁹ OMF missionaries who had been in Thailand for more than one year were sceptical about the benefits or necessity of studying Buddhism. They argued that Thai people were not sincere Buddhists, did not understand Buddhism and held an assortment of different religious beliefs. One participant said, "I have not met anyone who is serious about Buddhism, only one lady I met gave me a tape of Buddhist meditation to listen to. Buddhism is just an identity."²⁰ Another participant commented, "More and more I am discovering that most of the Thai that I talk to don't know much about Buddhism at all."²¹ Another remarked, "You ask them in the street; some believe in reincarnation, some don't, some believe there is a creator God, some don't...but they still call themselves Buddhists."²² The senior missionaries argued that it is more important to understand what Thai people do than what they believe. One contended:

In Thailand what you do is more important than what you believe...so I have some serious questions as to the importance of us fully understanding what Buddhism is...What is important for us to know is...why do they worship spirits, how do they worship spirits. That has nothing to do with Buddhism, that is animism (*sic*).²³

Noble reinforced this finding in her interview:

¹⁹ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean, 27 October 1998, Hangnaam, Chainat, tape recording.

²⁰ Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

²¹ Focus Group Number 2, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean, 27 October 1998, Hangnaam, Chainat, tape recording.

²² Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

²³ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

Unfortunately, a lot of our people see that your average Buddhist in Thailand really doesn't understand Buddhism and therefore they are not very interested in understanding. They are very practical and immediate rather than theoretical, although there are a few exceptions.²⁴

One senior missionary (3 percent) challenged the dominant conviction that an understanding of theoretical Buddhism was not important.²⁵ He argued that, "If you quote the Buddhist scriptures that carries a lot of weight... though you may quote something, and they don't know where it is from and they may never have read it before, they will bow to your superior knowledge."²⁶

Rev. Rory McKenzie worked with OMF in Thailand during the 1980s before returning to Scotland to pursue further studies at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World in Edinburgh University. He is currently completing a PhD in Buddhist studies. He confirmed the findings of the focus groups:

Speaking about the period 1980 onwards, my own feeling is that the missionaries in OMF had no real interest in Thai Buddhism, for a number of reasons. Firstly they came from a very strongly evangelical background where the sub-culture said it was wrong to study in depth world faiths, it wasn't spiritually helpful, so there wasn't any freedom in their mind to engage with Buddhism positively. Any engagement was negative. And, many of them, as they went around talking to Buddhists, got conflicting answers and many of them came to the conclusion they don't know themselves what real Buddhism is and in actual fact the practice is thoroughly animistic (*sic*), so it isn't really necessary to know much about Buddhism. So firstly we don't study it because we are evangelicals and there is nothing good in it, and secondly we don't need to study it because it is animism (*sic*) and they don't take their religion seriously.²⁷

McKenzie's attitude changed while completing further studies at Edinburgh University: "I began to feel that it was legitimate as a fairly evangelical Christian to study world religions and that there were good things in world faith."²⁸ McKenzie

²⁴ Brenda Noble, interview by Patricia McLean.

²⁵ Percentages are given of the total number of focus group participants.

²⁶ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

²⁷ Rev. Rory McKenzie, interview by Patricia McLean, 24 March 1998, Glasgow, tape recording.

²⁸ Ibid.

found developing a more open approach to other faiths relatively easy in Britain but reflected that his attitude might not have changed if he had carried on working in Thailand:

My guess is that if I had continued in Thailand I wouldn't have changed at all in my posture, I mean I wasn't particularly negative, but I wasn't positive... You see it is easy for me to be sympathetic to Buddhism here in the West.²⁹

3. An Unwillingness to be Involved in Thai Buddhist Culture

An inadequate understanding of the Thai Buddhist culture meant that OMF missionaries were ill-equipped to make decisions about what aspects of Thai Buddhist culture Thai Christians could, or could not, engage in. All agreed that conversion to Christianity entailed a rejection of Buddhism. Frey reported, "Quite a number of people ask if they can be Christian and Buddhist; throwing overboard their old system – there is the rub."³⁰ Eric Beresford wrote:

It is so hard to 'break through' the Buddhist crust. These dear people have known nothing but Buddhism for centuries and their lives are centred around the Buddhist temple. It is so hard for one to break away. So many wistfully ask, 'Can I be a Buddhist and a Christian at the same time?' Of course we have to answer 'no' and like the rich young ruler they turn sadly away.³¹

OMF missionaries in Central Thailand were unsure about what aspects of Thai Buddhist culture a Thai Christian could continue to participate in. The matter was discussed at Field Conference in October 1954. Beugler spoke about "superstitions and doubtful things" and contended, "Let us not be too hard on them, but positively teach the holiness of God and show the need for separation."³² The conference agreed: "We would not legislate for the indigenous churches, but rather by our own examples and exhortations would seek to show the necessity of separation."³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Emerson Frey, "Thailand needs Prayer," *The Millions* (UK), June (1954): 50.

³¹ Eric Beresford, "Cruising the Waterways," *East Asia Millions* (UK), February (1958): 13-14.

³² Dorothy Beugler, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 19-22 October 1954, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³³ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 19-22 October 1954, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

However, the following year Louis Almond asked Field Council for a 'code of conduct' that would provide guidelines for Christian behaviour. The request purported to have originated with the Thai Christians in Paknampho. Senior missionaries met to discuss the matter in January 1956. Field Council reported:

At that meeting the inherent dangers were mentioned, and emphasis placed on educating the young church in searching the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, avoidance of legalism, and avoidance of undue missionary influence.³⁴

Despite this apparent rejection of Almond's request Field Council appointed Jessie Woodward to review catechisms currently in use in Thailand. Woodward's report persuaded Field Council to draft its own catechism. The minutes record:

After a good deal of discussion it was proposed that Roy Ferguson, Jessie Woodward, Joan Wales, and Howard Hatton form a sub-committee to prepare the English version of a proposed catechism dealing with the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, avoiding as far as possible denomination bias, for translation into Thai at a future date; and that the provisional English draft be circulated to the general body of missionaries for examination and comment before final approval by the Field Council.³⁵

Field Council reported:

The draft, which was circulated to all missionaries, has caused serious doubts as to its suitability and it has become apparent that there is widespread misunderstanding concerning the aim and purpose. It is therefore decided to re-emphasise the objectives as follows; for young believers, a statement of fundamental tenets of Christian faith, it should be taught before baptism but not necessarily with a view to examination and graduation, the same basic truths will be repeatedly taught with increasing breadth and depth.³⁶

Eventually, two years after Almond's initial request, the catechism was published: *What Does the Bible Say?* Now out of print it is not possible to examine what the publication recommended. Given what is known about OMF's understanding of, and

³⁴ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 8 February 1956, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³⁵ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 2 April 1956, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³⁶ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 23 October 1956, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

attitude towards, Thai Buddhist culture it is likely that the publication advised Christians to withdraw from Buddhist practices, practices which OMF missionaries believed permeated the whole of Thai Buddhist culture. Ralph Willicome wrote:

Where national and religious life are bound together inseparably; where priest and temple are the centre of the life of the nation, the family, and the individual; where Christianity is the 'foreigner's religion' – it costs openly to declare oneself a follower of Jesus Christ. It costs one's livelihood where every office has its lighted candles before the image of Buddha or fresh flowers at spirit houses outside the door. It may cost one his friends and family.³⁷

It is evident that the mission had not yet reached a decision on the appropriateness of Christian engagement with many aspects of Thai Buddhist culture. At Field Conference in November 1959 OMF missionaries discussed whether or not Thai Christians could attend Buddhist ceremonies. The minutes record that a number of opinions were voiced but no consensus was reached.³⁸ In November 1964 OMF asked Pastor Boonmee, a visiting speaker from CCT, whether or not it was acceptable for a Christian to *wai* a Buddhist monk. Pastor Boonmee was able to assure them that it was acceptable because it did not involve worship and was merely a sign of respect.³⁹ At the annual Field Conference in 1969 OMF missionaries discussed so-called 'idolatry'.⁴⁰ It was agreed that qualifications for Christian baptism included "a definite break with idolatry and all its implications."⁴¹ The Central Committee, advised by OMF missionaries, decided that Christians who returned to idolatry should be disciplined by exclusion from full Christian fellowship

³⁷ Ralph Willicome, "The Stumbling Block," *The Millions* (UK), October (1954): 86.

³⁸ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 25 November to 3 December 1959, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

³⁹ Pastor Boonmee, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 12-18 November 1964, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁰ Although undefined it probably referred to a variety of Buddhist practices including Buddhist worship at home and at the temple.

⁴¹ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 23-30 November 1960, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

for one year. When invited back they were to remain under observation for an unspecified period.⁴²

The issues were again discussed at seminars on 8-10 February 1967. The exchange centred on whether or not it was necessary for a Buddhist to understand that conversion to Christianity entailed leaving Buddhism, *before* conversion. OMF missionaries were divided on this matter.⁴³ Although OMF missionaries expected Thai Christians to withdraw from Buddhist religious practices after conversion to Christianity it is apparent that a significant number of Christians continued to engage in them. Reporting on the church in Uthai Woodward wrote:

Many are still very ignorant of all but the simplest facts of the gospel. Many of them have made a complete break with the temple, others have made occasional visits when under much pressure, and some are struggling to make the break but are finding the pressure of friends and relatives too great.⁴⁴

In 1977 Bennett reported: "Poor attendance at meetings and a number of church members indulging in sinful practices but not as yet being willing to make a true break with these hangovers from the old life."⁴⁵ In Chainat "a breakthrough in one family seems to have been cancelled out with the believer's apparent reversion to spirit worship."⁴⁶ A report for Ladyao, Nakhon Sawan province, bemoaned the fact that some Christians had returned to temple worship and making merit after

⁴² Report on the Central Thailand Church Committee for Central Thailand Field Council, 6 August 1960 (presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 18-22 October 1960), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴³ Stu Imbach, A Brief Report and Summary of the Personal Evangelism Seminars, 8-10 February 1967 (presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, December 1967), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁴ Jessie Woodward, Annual Report from Uthai Station, 30 September 1962 (presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 21-27 November 1962), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁵ Alan Bennett, OMF Central Thailand Superintendents Report (presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 7-9 September 1977), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

conversion, remarking that the Christians "clear cut testimony had been marred."⁴⁷

At Field Conference in 1978 Roberts challenged the missionaries:

Do we 'breakdown' and 'dig out' the old way from new Christians sufficiently. Old ways of thought must be done away with. Are old sins brought to light and confessed? We need to ask not only about Buddhas, spirit strings, charms, incantations and related books but we need to help them confess other cooperation with spirits. Without this spiritual growth will be retarded.⁴⁸

A. Interviews

All OMF missionaries interviewed insisted that conversion to Christianity necessitated a rejection of Buddhism. Bennett argued that it is essential that a potential convert understands that, "Christianity is exclusive and that what we are asking them to do is to commit suicide to the past, to Buddhism."⁴⁹ Prasert said:

I expect them to have a complete break with Buddhism, *wai*-ing Buddhas, using spirit strings, having an ancestral shelf, going to fortune tellers. It is very hard...it is a very common question, 'Can we go both ways?' But we cannot serve two masters or be a member of two families.⁵⁰

New OMF missionaries arriving in Thailand in the 1990s and beyond are given a handbook detailing what aspects of Buddhist ceremonies they can participate in. It instructs them:

Do not kneel down or *wai* at the coffin. Do not go around the crematorium in procession. Do not *wai* as the priests preach, or chant. Give money only to help with funeral expenses...Do not put taper on the bier... There is nothing you can participate in at a Buddhist wedding except to eat the food, unless you are asked to give a speech.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Annual Report from Ladyao Station, 30 September 1979 (presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 13-18 November 1979), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁸ Ian Roberts, "Breakthrough in Church Building" (paper presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 31 October to 2 November 1978), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁴⁹ Alan Bennett, interview by Patricia McLean, 28 September 1998, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording.

⁵⁰ Molly Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁵¹ OMF Thailand, "The OMF Handbook," n.d. OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok, 65. It was not possible to cover this issue in the focus groups.

4. An Unwillingness to Consider the Possibility that Thai Buddhist Culture might Contribute to Thai Christianity

OMF missionaries working in Central Thailand were not willing to consider the possibility that Thai Buddhist culture might contribute to Thai Christianity, much less Thai Buddhism contribute to Thai Christianity. However, they were prepared to consider possible Christian equivalents, or substitutes, for jettisoned Buddhist religious practices. At a seminar on the emerging Thai church, held on 25-28 January 1965, Scott argued that it was vital to introduce Christian equivalents for Buddhist occasions, such as the annual prayer for blessing at New Year, the blessing of the harvest, the use of joss sticks and the practice of bowing to the corpse at funeral services.⁵² The issues were discussed but no consensus reached. At Field Conference in November 1967 OMF missionaries again broached the topic. Frey asked, "What substitutes should we offer or do we have to offer for Buddhist cultural customs and beliefs which Christians need to discard."⁵³ No decisions were made. Scott raised the issue again in a letter, expounding the dynamic equivalence model endorsed by LCWE in the Willowbank Report – *Gospel and Culture* in 1978:⁵⁴

It seems to me there is a whole host of small seemingly innocent practices which the Thai have in their ordinary daily cultural life which do really mean something to them and many of these practices are practices which I believe they could be taught to observe in a similar way, in a Christocentric pattern.⁵⁵

At Overseas Council in November 1977 Dr. Leon Morris argued that,

⁵² Isaac Scott, Minutes of the Church Building Seminar, 25-28 January 1965, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵³ Emerson Frey, "Suggested Discussion Questions" (questions presented for discussion at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, November 1967), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁵⁴ *Lausanne Occasional Papers*. No. 2: *The Willowbank Report: Report of the Consultation on Gospel and Culture Held at Willowbank, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda, 6-13 January 1978*, (Monrovia, California: Missions Advanced Research and Communications Centre (MARC)-World Vision International, 1978-1982).

⁵⁵ Isaac Scott in Malcolm Bradshaw, "Cultural Replacements for Pre-Christian Practices" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 9 October 1971), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

National Christians should be encouraged to grapple with cultural problems rather than foreign missionaries dictating the answer... That national Christians should be encouraged at an early stage to think through cultural ways of expressing Biblical faith.⁵⁶

Morris contended:

We are not consciously imperialistic. We always profess that our cultural values are secondary. But evangelicals, perhaps more than others, have found it difficult to disentangle the cultural and scriptural elements in their heritage, perhaps a legacy of their conservatism.⁵⁷

However, there is no indication that OMF in Central Thailand has seriously addressed these issues or offered an adequate response to the critical comments and suggestions made by Scott, Morris and others.

A. Interviews and Focus Groups

Only one missionary (3 percent) was willing to consider the possibility that Buddhism might have something to contribute to Thai Christianity. Speaking about spirituality he said:

I think there is a certain meekness about Buddhism that can contribute a lot to our Western spirituality... I think that spirituality is important. It impinges on how we deal with material things and the externals of our faith. I think that for Buddhists externals and how you live out your faith are important: the detachment from things...; how we live and deal with our material possessions; how our spirituality effects how we live; the ethics of everyday life that we pursue. I think that has something to say to Christians.⁵⁸

Challenged by others in the group he responded:

I am not saying that there is a deficiency in our theology or Christianity. What I am saying is that we need to begin by asking whether Buddhism, or any other religion, should be rejected outright as evil, black and wrong, or whether it is possible for us to see elements of the image of God within it? Are there pieces of truth within this religion which we can point to, redeem and figure out, and

⁵⁶ Dr. Leon Morris, "The Indigenisation of Theology" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 13-25 November 1977), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

praise God for, or do we reject it wholesale? I hesitate to reject the whole system as wrong.⁵⁹

All the other missionaries who responded positively to questions about how Thai Christianity might benefit from Thai Buddhist culture insisted that it was Thai culture, distinct from Thai religion, that had something to offer Christianity. One participant said it is,

Not Buddhism but culture we are talking about. Because the things we are talking about are actually Biblical Christianity. I think what being in a Buddhist culture does is make us as Western Christians re-examine our Christianity and ask: is this Biblical or is it Western?⁶⁰

All the focus groups spoke about the lack of ceremony, celebration and ritual in Thai Christianity and contrasted this with Thai Buddhism. One participant said, "I feel that we as missionaries make things so dry... It [ceremony] is part of their culture... when they become a Christian it is all stripped off and there is very little left."⁶¹ Another participant talked about Thai Christian funerals, insisting, "I have been to one Christian funeral and we have buried sheep at home with more dignity. I'm not saying all funerals are like that, but for the Buddhists who saw that there was almost no celebration."⁶²

⁵⁹ The quote has been paraphrased for purpose of clarity. The full quote reads: "I am not saying that there is a deficiency in our theology or Christianity. What I am saying is, I guess that the starting point, whether it is Buddhism or any other religion, is, are we to reject it wholesale as evil, black and wrong, and that is it, or do we see it as something that, yes, could possibly have elements of the image of God within it? Are there pieces of truth within this religion which we can point to, redeem and figure out and praise God for, or do we reject it wholesale? I hesitate to reject the whole system as wrong." Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Focus Group Number 5, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

⁶² Focus Group Number 3, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

However, at least four missionaries (12 percent) were disturbed by the Buddhist origins of these allegedly cultural practices. One participant articulated this particularly clearly: “I think the problem is that so much is so Buddhist that you can’t use it.”⁶³ Another participant, discussing the cultural practices associated with reverence that have been adopted by Thai Christianity, said, “The reverence of God is good, but if it is carried over from Buddhism I do not know whether it is.”⁶⁴ All the groups talked about the Christian adaptation of Loi Krathong and Songkran.⁶⁵ One senior missionary, with responsibilities for the cultural orientation of junior missionaries, volunteered:

I think we have all struggled with that. I think we would all like to see more events that are Christian orientated and sometimes we have talked about, lets say at Loi Krathong which is coming up next week, whether Christians could make floats with the cross on them and change some of the symbolism and float those down the river as well. But you ask yourself is this syncretism? Do we need to take completely new events and meanings or do we take what they’ve got and begin to use that and change its meaning?⁶⁶

⁶³ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

⁶⁴ Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

⁶⁵ Loi Krathong is celebrated on the night of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month (usually in mid-November). *Loi* means to float and *Krathong* is a leaf or a cup normally made of banana leaf. Usually a small coin, a candle and incense are placed inside the *krathong* before floating it down the river. The festival has a number of different interpretations. Some understand the festival to represent a prayer to the spirits of the water to take away sin, some as a prayer of thanks giving. Others do not believe the festival holds any religious significance at all but is merely a time of celebration. Songkran is the Thai New Year celebrated from 13-16 April. On the eve of Songkran houses are cleaned and anything old or useless is thrown away. On New Years day everyone wears new clothes and visits the temple to offer food to the monks. In the afternoon Buddha images are bathed as part of the ceremony. Young people pour scented water into the hands of elders and parents as a mark of respect while seeking the blessing of the older people. Young and old throw water over one another. Caged birds are ceremonially released and fish caught and returned to the river. Both acts are thought to be highly meritorious. Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Loy Krathong and Songkran Festival, Thailand Culture Series* (Bangkok: National Culture Institute, 1950).

⁶⁶ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

Asked if he had reached any conclusions he replied, "We haven't come to any decisions on that."⁶⁷ A fellow missionary insisted that decisions need to originate with Thai Christians:

My feeling is that we need to get it from the Thai people. We can offer suggestions but they need to come out with it...Thai Christians are divided over Loi Krathong because non-Christians, the Buddhists, are not sure either what they are doing on Loi Krathong, and so nobody is really firm on what is happening.⁶⁸

5. An Unwillingness to Recognise the Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Culture

OMF missionaries in Central Thailand believed that Thai Buddhism and Thai Buddhist culture were imbued with a Satanic presence and are therefore outwith the presence of God. Reporting on the future of CIM, post China, Bishop Frank Houghton, General Director of CIM, argued: "We must accept a new challenge to assault the strongholds of Satan."⁶⁹ Shortly after arriving in Thailand Eileen Cann wrote, "We were so elated to challenge this stronghold of Satan with the powerful Word of God, right on His (*sic*) own territory."⁷⁰ Beugler reported,

In this town of Saraburi God has no place to dwell except in the hearts of us three [missionaries]...For centuries Satan has held uncontested sway here, darkening minds and receiving the worship that rightfully belongs to our God.⁷¹

Frey alone asked, "Has not God had a purpose in this? Surely He (*sic*) has been behind the preservation of the Tai race through four thousand years so that not only is it not a decadent race but one which show surprising virility and vitality."⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bishop Frank Houghton, Report on the CIM Directors' Conference in Melbourne on 12 February 1951, n.d., OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁷⁰ Eileen Cann, "For the First Time," *The Millions* (UK), September (1953): 63.

⁷¹ Dorothy Beugler, "In Thailand's Gospel Vacuum," *China's Millions* (UK), September (1952): 63.

⁷² Emerson Frey, "Migrations of the Tai," *The Millions* (UK), January (1953): 8.

OMF missionaries held that Buddhism caused people to misunderstand Christianity prior to conversion and made it difficult for them to grow in an understanding of their faith post-conversion. Reporting to Overseas Council in 1953 Faulkner stated, "The deadening power of Buddhism has clouded the minds of the millions in this land who need the Gospel of Christ."⁷³ Maddox contended that medical work "is needed in disarming the prevailing Buddhist misunderstanding prejudice, or indifference to the Christian gospel."⁷⁴

A. Interviews and Focus Groups

Two junior missionaries, who had been in Thailand for less than one year, (6 percent) spoke positively about Buddhism and were willing to consider the possibility of God being present in Thai Buddhist culture. One said, "I believe that, little though it may be, systems of belief, religions like Buddhism, have within them elements of the image of God...I cannot say that it is God-given because if it is God-given it holds the possibility of salvation."⁷⁵ All the other junior missionaries and most of the senior missionaries (85 percent) were adamant that Buddhism and Thai Buddhist culture were outwith the presence of God, even Satanic. One argued, "I believe that it [Buddhism] is Satan's method of keeping people in darkness just like any other religion."⁷⁶ Another, "Buddhism today is a demonic power, we should not compare it with the teaching of Buddha years ago, it is really demonic, it is really a big dark power and we really have to oppose it."⁷⁷ Three missionaries (9 percent) insisted that the Buddhist religion came into being as a direct result of the Thai people corporately rejecting God. One said, "Thailand as a society has basically lost the knowledge of God, there has been a turning away from God, a rebellion from

⁷³ Cyril Faulkner, "A Report on OMF's Work in Central Thailand" (paper presented at Overseas Council, 4 April 1953), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁷⁴ Dr. Chris Maddox, A Memo on the Hospital Project, n.d., OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁷⁵ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Focus Group Number 5, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

God, so they have lost within their culture the ability to connect with God.”⁷⁸

Another said it is “part of our human nature to create something which we are then misled to believe and hinders us from grasping the Gospel.”⁷⁹

Three senior missionaries, who had been in Thailand for more than five years, (9 percent) spoke positively about Buddhism and were willing to consider the possibility of God being present in Thai Buddhist culture. One missionary said, “I see that Buddhism may have kept the Thai people out of the depths of evil they may have gone to without it. In some ways it has had a restraining role in the culture.”⁸⁰ Faced with the challenge “that is not Buddhism that is God’s grace,” she replied, “Yes, but somehow God has used that [Buddhism], maybe even given it to them.”⁸¹ Another missionary spoke about the relationship between the Buddhist law and God’s law:

I have a feeling that the Buddhist laws are in some sense law, God’s school master to bring us to Christ. The striving to be good is something that God has been hoping to use, giving them a sense that they need him, that they need someone outside themselves.⁸²

Insisting that God must have used Buddhism to communicate to Thai people he said, “Theologically it is necessary... God has worked through Buddhism to bring truth... there is truth in Buddhism.”⁸³

⁷⁸ Focus Group, Number 3, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

⁷⁹ Focus Group, Number 5, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

⁸⁰ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

⁸³ Ibid.

6. An Uncertain Response to the Question: Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?

The minutes of the first Overseas Council in April 1953 state that all OMF candidates were expected to produce “a written statement of their convictions regarding...the eternal life of the saved and the eternal punishment of the lost.”⁸⁴ In November 1961, when the *Principles and Practices* of the mission were revised, it was stated that, “Candidates are expected to satisfy the Directors and the Council to which they apply as to their soundness in the faith on all fundamental truths as generally held by evangelical churches.” This included acceptance of the “eternal punishment of the lost.”⁸⁵ Bennett, who arrived in Thailand in 1968, recalled, “We had to write a statement on what we believed regarding the lost, the word ‘the lost’ was the catch phrase. We were asked to say that those that were lost were committed to eternal judgement.”⁸⁶

OMF Directors repeatedly reaffirmed the conviction that those who had not heard of, and had not responded to, Jesus Christ were without hope of eternal salvation.

Addressing Overseas Council in May 1960 Sanders asked,

Is the spirit of Hudson Taylor’s cry of ‘a million a month dying without Christ’, and a deep realisation of eternal damnation truly awaiting the lost, foreign to us today? Our measured policies of good grounding in language and adaptation to new lands and problems tend to quench the fire and to blunt the edge of zeal for God and passion for souls.⁸⁷

Scott wrote to all OMF missionaries in Central Thailand on 15 March 1967 quoting the words of Calvin Guy:

We need to get rid of the ‘easy opinion of the state of man (*sic*) without Christ, no one can describe the terrible lostness of men (*sic*) without Christ. He (*sic*)

⁸⁴ Minutes of the Overseas Council, 14 April 1953, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the Overseas Council, November 1961, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

⁸⁶ Alan Bennett, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁸⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, “The Spiritual Strategy of the Mission” (paper presented at Overseas Council, May 1960), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

who believeth not is condemned already...Men (*sic*) are brought to redemption in their brief life's span or they are eternally without God and hope.'⁸⁸

On 1 January 1979 Bennett wrote: "In an age when dialogue, brotherhood of man (*sic*) and compromise are esteemed it is becoming unacceptable to brand all other religions a lie. But unless we do, we do not have a message for this land."⁸⁹ The following year he articulated his opinions on the eternal state of the unsaved:

The salvation that God has brought about in Jesus Christ is not a re-heat or re-shaping of already existing religions or customs of people, but rather a revolutionary message supported by signs and wonders, that people in every country could see if their eyes were open...Mankind (*sic*) is *already* heading for judgement before God... We are pleading for a decision to repent, turn back to God, and go into eternity singing before the Lord for joy along with all creation.⁹⁰

On 18 June 1983 Peter Farrington and Roberts asked, "Do we really believe that 98 percent of the people in Asia are a write off as far as eternity is concerned unless they are reached with the gospel and have an opportunity to be saved?"⁹¹

A. Interviews and Focus Groups

OMF missionaries included in the focus groups were divided on this issue. There was at least one missionary in all six of the focus groups who insisted that Buddhists could not be saved. One participant remarked, "I really struggle to see how it is possible from scripture to say that it is possible to be saved without conscious faith in Jesus."⁹² Another participant, endeavouring to speak for the whole group, said, "I think we all believe that you have to accept Christ, so if they don't do that then I

⁸⁸ Calvin Guy in Isaac Scott, to OMF Missionaries in Central Thailand, 15 March 1967, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁸⁹ Alan Bennett to OMF Missionaries in Central Thailand, 1 January 1979, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁹⁰ Alan Bennett to OMF Missionaries in Central Thailand, 21 August 1981, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁹¹ Peter Farrington and Ian Roberts to OMF Missionaries in Central Thailand, 18 June 1983, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

⁹² Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

guess no [you will not be saved].”⁹³ However, there were one or two missionaries in every group who argued that Buddhists without an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ could be saved. One said,

The extreme exclusivist will say that God only came and worked where there was a verbal proclamation of the Gospel and people could consciously verbally put their trust in Jesus Christ. I can’t tighten up that much, I have to be wider, and I think Scripture sees God’s mercy as a bit wider than that.⁹⁴

Another remarked, “They didn’t see Jesus and they didn’t know the full extent of the cross, but God was at work... I think we may be surprised by the presence of Thai Buddhists in heaven.”⁹⁵

Those who understood God’s mercy to be more wide ranging than OMF missionaries had previously thought suggested that Buddhists who seek God will find God. One missionary said: I believe that those who do not depend on themselves for salvation but reach out to God for salvation may be saved through the work of Christ even if they are not able to confess Christ verbally.⁹⁶ Another missionary argued that, “Surely there must have been people in Thailand who were brought up in Buddhism and must have thought all this must come from somewhere and given some praise and worship to the creator.”⁹⁷ They suggested that God might judge people differently: “I think the good Lord is righteous and He (sic) judges them by their own standards...if someone is really searching for the truth then they will meet the Lord,

⁹³ Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

⁹⁴ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid. This quote was paraphrased for clarity from: “I believe that the person who reaches out, not depending on their own merit but on God who is there, and asking for hope for salvation, not based on their own good works or Buddhism, when someone reaches out to God, they may not, they won’t be able to confess Christ verbally, but I believe that they can be saved through the work of Christ.”

⁹⁷ Focus Group Number 3, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

through all ages.”⁹⁸ They made a comparison between Buddhists who did not know of Jesus Christ and Israelites in the Old Testament. One said, “It is just the same as in the Old Testament. They [Jews] were seeking out and looking for the saviour before the saviour appeared.”⁹⁹ However, another asked,

“Now I still have a question mark on that one you see because Judaism isn’t the same. Judaism is a revealed religion where as Buddhism is a human philosophy that has gone slightly wrong. But there is a similarity and you can say a good Buddhist is searching for the truth. He is someone who is looking for the truth.”¹⁰⁰

7. The Acculturation of Christianity in Thai Buddhist Culture

On 9 July 1954 Christian Witness Press reported that “Emerson [Frey] has again mentioned the importance of having a Thai ‘flavour’ rather than a foreign one, in the things we produce, and we must emphasise it more and strive for it.”¹⁰¹ The following year Arthur Grant, OMF missionary with responsibility for the production of Christian literature, asked, “Is it [evangelistic literature] adapted to the cultural and educational standards of the people? Does it deal with the subjects most vital to the spiritual needs of the readers?”¹⁰² In response to these voices Chinese literature was translated into Thai and given a Thai ‘flavour’ by darkening the skin colour of the figures in the illustrations.¹⁰³ OMF endeavoured to present Jesus as Asiatic rather than Western and the Christian religion as Oriental rather than Occidental. One missionary suggested that evangelistic tracts could be based on questions frequently

⁹⁸ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

⁹⁹ Focus Group Number 3, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰⁰ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰¹ Report from Christian Witness Press (presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 7-9 July 1954), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹⁰² Arthur E. Grant, “Report from the Literature Department” (presented at the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 20-24 November 1955), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹⁰³ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 2-4 June 1953, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

asked by Thai Buddhists. Arthur Glasser, OMF Director in Singapore, suggested that testimonies of Thai Christians could be presented in evangelistic literature contending that the only way to understand what it means to be a Thai and a Christian is to listen to the testimonies of Thai Christians. When his recommendation was rejected Glasser wrote to Faulkner:

My thought was that you do not have any better source material for tracts than the records of conversions of Thai Christians. What are the thoughts of the Thai about sin and self and God prior to conversion? Only the converted can tell you. What are the impressions the Gospel makes on Thai minds and hearts when they first hear it? Only they can tell you. We cannot describe these things as we Westerners see them and hope to produce something that 'rings true' to the people of Thailand. We can write theological essays or quote Scriptures and tack on appeals at the end. But this type of tract is not likely to grip the hearts of the unsaved.¹⁰⁴

A series of Thai sentences and special phrases to be used in preaching were collected together. Missionaries were encouraged to learn them by rote. Bell recalled his admiration of Beresford who had a seventeen-sentence-sermon.¹⁰⁵ However, the use of the so-called religious sentences was called into question at Field Council in April 1958. A number of sentences were deemed unhelpful and removed from the list. One member of the council remarked that:

While talking with Mrs. Jit she mentioned that many of those being examined by her are sadly lacking in everyday vocabulary. They can reel off some religious sentences on the theme which is asked for in the exams, but when it comes to talking about everyday matters they are at a loss. The obvious inference is this: they seldom get out amongst the people and just chat. Mrs. Jit suggests that those in that position will never learn the language well or make friends with the common people until they are willing, while visiting people, to talk about other things besides religion.¹⁰⁶

There was an ongoing discussion about the most effective way to communicate Christ to Thai Buddhists. At Field Conference in 1957 "it was generally agreed that a

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Glasser to Cyril Faulkner, 15 March 1957, OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹⁰⁵ Rowland Bell, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of the Central Thailand Field Council, 24-28 February 1958, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

logical and positive approach presenting Christ is best. The accepted form of communication whether oral or written was 'logical' and 'positive', the accepted content was the proposition that 'Christ died for sin.'"¹⁰⁷ John Kuhn argued:

The simple heart of the message may be presented in the shortest time on the briefest contact with a traveller or sick man; when more time is available, it may be presented with a wealth of illustrations from Scripture, all made to focus upon the simple and supreme truth: 'Christ died for our sins.'¹⁰⁸

It was accepted that an understanding of sin, defined by OMF missionaries, and an acceptance as oneself as a sinner was critical for conversion to Christianity.

Commenting on one man's decision to convert to Christianity Eileen Scott wrote,

He gained a good mental grasp of where Buddhism fails, and understood that it is Christ alone who can forgive sins... But oh, how desperately folk need to *feel* the awfulness of sin and its consequences. According to the belief of most of the country people, to sin is to kill animals and fish! Other wrongdoing is quite subsidiary to this, and so when we say we must repent and forsake sin, some old grannies will ask, 'well, what are we to eat if we don't sin?' Sometimes we meet with blank indifference to the amazing message that they hear for the first time.¹⁰⁹

OMF missionaries in Central Thailand were beginning to realise that Christians and Buddhist used the term *baab* (sin) quite differently. Frey stated that, "The hindrance in Thailand to people turning to Christ is the lack of conviction of sin."¹¹⁰ Beugler argued that, "We come with good news, and yet so many tracts and messages are on the subject of sin; sin is not good news to a Buddhist."¹¹¹ To which another asked, "Should our presentation of the gospel not be affected by the people to whom we preach? Since the people of Central Thailand have little conception of God or sin,

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹⁰⁸ John Kuhn, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹⁰⁹ Eileen Scott, "Along the Waterways of Central Thailand," *East Asia Millions* (UK), May (1955): 42

¹¹⁰ Emerson Frey, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹¹ Dorothy Beugler, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

these should be explained.”¹¹² Kuhn replied: “Whilst there is Scriptural ground for taking people’s backgrounds into consideration, it is possible to give this undue emphasis. Man’s (*sic*) basic position and need is the same in all cultures and the crux of the gospel is the same for all.”¹¹³ When Roy Carswell suggested that they should learn what aspects of the Gospel were particularly significant to Thai Christians, Cooke recalled that Samyong “had told her that the thing that impressed him most was the fact of the creator: he had never known anyone greater than Buddha.”¹¹⁴

In November 1964 Dr. Kenneth Wells, an American Presbyterian fraternal worker with a particular interest in Thai Buddhism, was invited to address Field Conference.¹¹⁵ He spoke about the historical and psychological implications of Buddhism and stressed the importance of Buddhism for even allegedly nominal Buddhists. Wells strongly recommended that missionaries should not refer to Buddhism in evangelism contending that their remarks “can so easily be misheard or misrepresented.”¹¹⁶ Pastor Boonmee also addressed the conference speaking about the evangelistic approach to Buddhists. He warned the missionaries not to speak against Buddhism and recommended that they begin by talking about God as creator.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹³ John Kuhn, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹⁴ Mary Cooke, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 4-10 December 1957, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok. At that time Samyong was a Christian of only one year standing. He was inducted as a full-time pastor in 1965. See Chapter Four: 3. A., “The Overseas Missionary Fellowships’ and the Associated Churches in Thailand’s Approach to Evangelism.”

¹¹⁵ For details about Wells see Chapter Five: 2. A., “New Initiatives in Buddhist Studies.”

¹¹⁶ Dr. Kenneth Wells, Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 12-18 November 1964, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 12-18 November 1964, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s OMF missionaries were confident that they were communicating the Christian faith clearly. In November 1952 Frey reported that those who attended the Bible classes “had been heavily saturated with the truth” and that “many of these have been told the message clearly.”¹¹⁸ They were convinced that those who heard were able to make an informed decision for or against Christianity. This reinforced their conviction that “it is only because of the great barrier of Buddhism that many have not come out wholly for the Lord.”¹¹⁹ By the 1970s OMF missionaries’ confidence in their ability to communicate the crux of Christianity clearly to Thai Buddhists was beginning to give way. Griffiths asked:

Is the reason for the lack of responsiveness in some of our fields, not the blinding of people’s eyes by the ‘god of this world’ but the failure of our missionaries to communicate the gospel meaningfully and effectively, because it has not been sufficiently clearly expressed? Are we making spiritual excuses for what is really a technical problem of inadequate communication?¹²⁰

This suggestion was supported by the findings of a seminar with senior missionaries. They expressed the difficulties they were having adequately communicating Christianity to Thai Buddhists. They spoke of an “inadequate knowledge of Thai Buddhist concepts and values” and said that they didn’t “know much about their ‘faith’ in spirits.”¹²¹ In July 1974 the Church Planting Committee received a request for a seminar “to help us to put over Christian truth to people whose thought patterns and concepts have been moulded by Buddhism.”¹²² A request for prayer described the primary hindrances to faith as “a lack of understanding of who God is, and an entirely different concept of sin.”¹²³

¹¹⁸ Emerson Frey, “Report on Paknampho Station” (presented at Central Thailand Field Council, 12-14 November 1952), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹¹⁹ Cyril Faulkner, Annual Report on Central Thailand, 31 December 1954, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹²⁰ Michael Griffiths, “Improving Cultural Appreciation” (paper presented at Overseas Council, 27 September to 8 October 1975), OMF International Headquarters, Singapore.

¹²¹ Seminar for Missionaries on Communicating and Comprehending, June 1977, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹²² Minutes of the Church Planting Committee, 7 July 1977, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹²³ Prayer Thrust for Breakthrough in Thailand, Supplementary Prayer Information, 3 April 1979, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

In response to a request for more help in communicating the Gospel the Church Planters Forum invited Pastor Wan Petchasongkram, pastor of an independent indigenous church in Bangkok, to address the mission. He both stressed the gap between what Christian missionaries and Thai Buddhists believe and argued that it was necessary to have a good understanding of Thai beliefs in order to communicate effectively.¹²⁴ Pastor Wan insisted, “Even though you have knowledge about what Buddhism teaches you have never believed it yourself. Therefore it is difficult for you to fully understand the beliefs of those who have become Christians.”¹²⁵ The following year Pastor Wan was invited back to teach on Thai beliefs in spirits.

The Gospel Facing Buddhist Cultures, by Alex Smith an OMF missionary working in Central Thailand, was published in 1980.¹²⁶ In it Smith reviewed the differences between Christianity and Buddhism and suggested ways in which Christian missionaries might communicate the Gospel to Thai Buddhists. He believed that Christian missionaries should boldly challenge Thai Buddhism, maintaining that exposing the inconsistencies in Thai Buddhism can form the basis of an argument that will convince Thai Buddhists of the Gospel.¹²⁷ He concluded that effective evangelism demands: “concentrated prayer,” an understanding of the social-cultural tensions that arise at the point of conversion to Christianity and a “bold, though humble, confrontation of the Gospel with Buddhism.”¹²⁸

In 1981 Bob Trelogan, a senior missionary in Central Thailand, addressed the Church Planters Forum. He spoke about how he explained the Gospel to Buddhists, looking at the concepts of sin and *kamma*. He suggested that *kamma* is the principal

¹²⁴ Minutes of the Church Planters Forum, 28-29 February 1980, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹²⁵ Pastor Wan Petchasongkram, “Teaching New Christians”(paper presented at the Church Planters Forum, 28-29 February 1980), OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹²⁶ Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1960.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 27.

problem for Thai Buddhists, not sin, because it is *kamma*, not sin, which passes from one life to the next.¹²⁹ Trelogan's suggestions were not unanimously accepted. In the discussion that followed different opinions were expressed, some contending that an evangelistic message should begin with God while others argued that it should begin with sin. Almond argued, "We must have a sense of sin and wanting to know God, otherwise people will know Him (*sic*) for the wrong reasons. We have taught that God is a problem solver: He (*sic*) is, but that is the wrong concept."¹³⁰ At Field Conference in 1982 a panel discussion was held on communicating to Buddhists. Following the discussion conference concluded:

The minimum level of biblical understanding required for one to make a valid like commitment to Jesus Christ is: a belief in one God, a proper recognition of the Biblical significance of the nature of man (*sic*) as a sinner, a grasp of the uniqueness of Jesus in salvation.¹³¹

One or two missionaries were beginning to realise that the way in which they acculturated Christianity had a limited effect on the way in which Thai Christians' inculturated Christianity. Gray commented:

Buddhist attitudes still lurking in the background of their minds which is preventing them from being fully dedicated to the Lord, though not their intention, their desire is to be 100 percent to the Lord, and yet they are not aware of these areas of their lives where they are thinking as a Buddhist thinks, reacting as a Buddhist reacts and behaving as a Buddhist behaves, instead of behaving as a Christian.¹³²

Bell recalled, "Later on I began to find that they [Thai Christians] wouldn't, they didn't understand correctly, not 100 percent anyway. It was flavoured by Buddhism,

¹²⁹ Bob Trelogan, Minutes of the Church Planters Forum, 10-11 September 1981, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹³⁰ Louis Almond, Minutes of the Church Planters Forum, 10-11 September 1981, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹³¹ Minutes of the annual Central Thailand Field Conference, 3-7 November 1982, OMF Thailand Headquarters, Bangkok.

¹³² Sally Gray, interview by Alex Smith, 22 June 1992, Alex Smith's personal collection, tape recording.

it meant they looked at things and pondered with a Buddhist perception, and that their perception was coloured.”¹³³

In 1990 John Davis, an OMF missionary working in North Thailand, completed doctoral research on the inculturation of the Gospel in the Thai Buddhist context.¹³⁴

The thesis was published by Kanok Bannasan, the OMF publishing house in Bangkok, in 1993.¹³⁵ Davis critiqued the way in which evangelical missionaries, including OMF, have inculturated the Gospel in Thailand. He argued that culture and religion “were all wrapped up together and rejected as alien,” and that missionaries believed that “using any one part of the recipient culture as a valid vehicle for the Gospel would result (as far as they could see) in debasing its pure character.”¹³⁶

Davis contended that it was possible to inculturate the Gospel without moving towards syncretism, considering syncretism to have occurred “when the critical and basic elements of the Gospel are lost in the process of contextualisation.”¹³⁷

Davis argued that Christians should be willing to consider more meaningful ways of inculturating the Gospel in Thailand. He discussed the use of Thai Buddhist terms to communicate Christian concepts, such as *dhamma* to translate and communicate the Christian teaching about God. He explored other ways in which the Gospel might be communicated in Thailand, including: drama; envisioning evangelism as a power encounter between Christ and the spirits;¹³⁸ and the appropriation of the Buddhist teaching about the *Phra See An*.¹³⁹ He proposed that Christian missionaries introduce

¹³³ Rowland Bell, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹³⁴ John R. Davis, “Towards a Contextualised Theology for the Church in Thailand” (Ph.D., Birmingham University, 1990).

¹³⁵ John R. Davis, *Poles Apart? Contextualising the Gospel* (Bangkok: Kanok Bannasan, 1993).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³⁷ Buswell in Davis, *Poles Apart? Contextualising the Gospel*, 23.

¹³⁸ Davis, *Poles Apart? Contextualising the Gospel*, 103-113.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-127. The Thai term ‘*Phra See An*’ refers to the future Buddha also known as *Ariya Metrai* and *Phra Pho Thi Sat*. Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan documents describe the life of the future Buddha and all Buddhists look forward to his coming. The Buddhist scriptures proclaim that he will preach the true *Dhamma* enabling himself and many of his disciples to enter *nibbana* (Edward

acceptable substitutes for Thai Buddhist rituals and customs.¹⁴⁰ Davis argued that missionaries and Thai Christians have been slow to inculturate the Gospel in Thailand but insisted that it is now the responsibility of Thai Christians to develop these ideas further.

A. Interviews and Focus Groups

At least twenty focus group participants (60 percent) were reluctant to explore ways in which Buddhist terms and concepts might be used to communicate Christianity more effectively to Thai Buddhists. Bennett's comment is typical of these missionaries:

Buddhism is a syncretistic religion. Buddhism is more than happy to take on anything else... Therefore as Christians we must avoid making it easy for them to do that... There has got to be a fence. So I personally am wary of trying to dismantle the fence so that there is no difference, because there is a difference and we can't avoid it.¹⁴¹

The focus group participants were fearful that utilising Buddhist ideas in evangelism would reinforce Buddhist beliefs and practices. Four missionaries (12 percent) expressed concern that this might contribute to the emergence of heretical views. One participant warned, "You would have to be very careful that you were not unintentionally preaching heresy or using terms that had a whole meaning that you didn't know about. I would be really cautious about it."¹⁴² Five focus group participants (15 percent) argued that Christianity and Buddhism should remain strikingly dissimilar. One missionary said:

Conze, *Buddhist Scriptures: Selected and Translated by Edward Conze* (Harmondsworth (UK), Baltimore (USA), Victoria (Australia): Penguin Books Ltd., 1959), 237-242). Early APM missionaries discovered that some Thai Buddhists readily identified Jesus with *Phra See An*. The missionaries did not, however, encourage that association and today most Thai Christians do not readily identify Jesus with *Phra See An* (Smith, *Siamese Gold, A History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretative Analysis 1816-1982*, 112-116).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 80-102.

¹⁴¹ Alan Bennett, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹⁴² Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

Christianity needs to be a bit Western so that it is seen to be different, so that the Thai don't put it together [with Buddhism]...Missionaries can make Christianity look too similar to Buddhism. There is a need for clarity and distinction between the two faiths.¹⁴³

This remark was contested by another in the group:

I don't get the impression that there are so many churches going overboard in their contextualisation that they are going to the extreme of trying to adapt to the culture...I don't hear that...may be somewhere in Thailand the churches have really taken contextualisation on board and are way out on a limb...if that is the case I would like to go see that church...but I haven't heard that situation. To me it seems to be the other end of the spectrum, churches are struggling to see their worship services as Thai.¹⁴⁴

Fifteen interviewees (44 percent) expressed the view that it was "most helpful for me...just to tell about Jesus and the truth and let them make their own assumptions from their own beliefs."¹⁴⁵ They argued that, "If you get too much into Buddhism then your whole plot might be to try and compare them and to argue."¹⁴⁶ Many of the missionaries, both junior and senior, said that they simply did not have enough knowledge of Buddhism to acculturate Christianity. Typically they commented: "We just don't have the terms, we don't have the experience."¹⁴⁷ Others argued that it was not the place of the missionary to utilise Buddhism to communicate Christ, contending that, "You need to be a Thai Buddhist to do that."¹⁴⁸

However, there were one or two in every focus group who were in favour of utilising Buddhist terms to communicate the Gospel. One junior missionary, discussing the possibility of using the idea that Christ makes merit for us said:

It rings alarm bells in my head as soon as I hear it, but I know that lots of things do so that does not mean I am right...Because Christianity and Buddhism are so alien, if you have no point of contact they just might not

¹⁴³ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

understand you at all, or else they might re-load it themselves, so your are as well making yourself clear.¹⁴⁹

Those in favour of using Buddhist terms and concepts were, however, not sure how to do so. Only five senior missionaries (15 percent) were able to speak with any confidence about their own experiences. One missionary said: "You don't begin with Jesus, you begin with God and creation... It is very easy for people to accept that God created the world, that is what I find."¹⁵⁰ Another said, "I still get back to that fundamental question, either there is a God, or there isn't. I think that once a person will accept that there is a creator God it is not that far for him to believe in Jesus."¹⁵¹ Two missionaries (6 percent) spoke about *kamma* and said that they would talk about God as the one who administers the law of *kamma*. Most missionaries were aware of the discrepancies between the Buddhist and Christian concept of sin or *baab*. They commented that Thai people "don't think about the first things that we would think about such as murder or adultery or such."¹⁵² They said that, "Sometimes it is quite hard to get them to realise that they are actually sinners."¹⁵³ However, only one missionary was able to explain how he communicated the Christian understanding of sin to Thai Buddhists:

"Well you say we have made a lot of bad *kamma* in the past, *weenkam mai dee*,¹⁵⁴ and Jesus came to take on himself the punishment for that *kamma* so we can be set free. And he also came to, well I use the word merit as well, *bun*. We can actually use the picture of the man going into the priesthood at twenty to earn merit for his parents. We can say you are looking for merit, well that is good, but a sinner cannot redeem a sinner. But God's son who comes from heaven who is perfect, He can redeem us, so as to give us pure merit that

¹⁴⁹ Focus Group Number 1, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for less than one year by Patricia McLean.

¹⁵⁰ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

¹⁵¹ Focus Group Number 4, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand between one and five years by Patricia McLean.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Translates as, "My *kam* isn't good."

comes down from heaven, so that we can be people of complete merit in God's sight."¹⁵⁵

Asked why he started explaining it this way he said that he heard other Thai Christians using these terms and copied them.

All the focus groups participants were asked whether or not they had read Davis, *Poles Apart? Contextualising the Gospel*. Although one or two in every group had read it, no one was able to recall what Davis had written in any detail and no one was willing to express an opinion on his thesis.

8. Conclusion

OMF missionaries arrived in Thailand with little or no understanding of Thai Buddhism. Because of their anti-ecumenical stance, inherited from CIM, they chose to work alone and only sought the advice of experienced missionaries in APM and Thai Christians in CCT on rare occasions. Their understanding of Thai Buddhism represented an accumulation of their limited experiences, compounded by their inadequate grasp of the Thai language, and insufficient literature on Thai Buddhism. Although the language program improved, cultural orientation and instruction in Thai Buddhism remained poor.

OMF missionaries' interest in Thai Buddhist culture was wholly pragmatic. They studied the Thai language, Thai culture and Thai Buddhism so that they could convert Buddhists to Christianity. Those who did not believe an understanding of Thai Buddhism would enhance their proclamation of the Gospel showed no interest in Thai Buddhism. Those who believed an understanding of Thai Buddhism would enhance their proclamation of the Gospel studied Thai Buddhism in order to communicate more effectively to Thai Buddhists. Only one OMF missionary was prompted by his interest in and respect for Thai Buddhist culture to engage in a more comprehensive study of its religious character. His attitude toward Thai Buddhism changed after he left Thailand and he did not return to work with OMF.

¹⁵⁵ Focus Group Number 6, with OMF missionaries who have worked in Thailand for more than five years by Patricia McLean.

OMF missionaries' negative attitudes toward Thai Buddhism were directly related to their theological presuppositions. They believed that God's presence was manifested in the church alone. The mission, an extension of the church, was understood to be the sole receptacle of God's presence in a God-less land. Thai Buddhist culture was understood to be outwith the presence of God, possibly demonic, and Thai Buddhism was interpreted as either a human creation or a demonic manifestation. Focus group participants who expressed an alternative interpretation of Thai Buddhism were rebuffed by their colleagues who strove to present a conservative theological position. The dominant theological stance of OMF missionaries in Central Thailand reflects the thinking of the world-wide evangelical movement articulated by LCWE.

Conclusion to Part Two

1. A Comparison between the American Presbyterians and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship Missionaries in Thailand

As a member of WCC PCUSA was significantly influenced by mission theology emerging out of the ecumenical movement. It was committed to promoting equal relationships between local Christians and Western missionaries, churches in the South and churches in the North, and believed that this required the integration of Western missionaries into the churches in the South and termination of independent Western mission organisation. By contrast, OMF chose not to join WCC and advocated an altogether different policy toward mission-church relations. OMF insisted that mission organisations should maintain their independence, believing that equitable relationships between missions and churches in the North and those in the South could be achieved without the missions integrating into the churches.

Ryburn rigorously enforced BFM's policy in Thailand. American Presbyterian missionaries were integrated into CCT and APM in Thailand was formally terminated. However, the act of integration did not give rise to more equitable relationships between Americans and Thais, UPC and CCT, immediately. American Presbyterians were reluctant to forgo the privileges and power associated with the mission's dominant position and unwilling to accept the church, and Thai Christians, as equal partners. Thai Christians, dependent on personnel and resources from overseas, were hesitant to relinquish the patron-client relationship between UPC and CCT. Thus the foundation of an equal partnership between UPC and CCT was laid with the termination of APM but was not achieved until the influential members of APM left Thailand. OMF endeavoured to establish an equal partnership between mission and church on a different foundation. It believed it could establish an equal partnership with ACTC without integrating itself into ACTC. It has been unable to do so. OMF has been unwilling to relinquish responsibility for the Thai church to Thai Christians, its missiological presuppositions preventing it from moving toward a more even-handed relationship with the Thai church. Its insistence that mission

organisations should remain independent of churches and belief that mission organisations, not churches, are primarily responsible for mission, negates an equal partnership between mission and church. The churches' mission work, inclusive of much of the life of the church, is inevitably subsumed under the aegis of the mission organisation. For example OMF-only committees decide where new churches will be planted, who will plant them and how they will be planted. The term 'partnership' has been used by OMF missionaries in Thailand to describe their relationship with ACTC. However, in reality the partnership between OMF and ACTC is unequal, OMF dictating the particulars of the relationship between itself and the Thai church that it founded.

In the process of integrating themselves into CCT the Presbyterians committed themselves to developing a new relationship with Thai Buddhist culture that entailed the acceptance and utilisation of Thai Buddhist culture in the church. Thai drama, music and dance were used in evangelism and worship with the full support of the missionaries and increasing support of Thai Christians. Some missionaries showed a particular interest in Thai Buddhist culture and developed considerable expertise in this field. OMF missionaries were initially less willing to explore Thai Buddhist culture. Their theological presuppositions inferred that conversion from Buddhism to Christianity involved the transition from Thai Buddhist culture to an undefined Christian culture and they were unable to comprehend in what way that nebulous Christian culture might be Thai. Increasingly positive attitudes toward culture throughout the world-wide evangelical community encouraged them to adopt a more positive attitude toward Thai Buddhist culture. However, their interest in Thai Buddhist culture was wholly pragmatic. They sought to understand Thai Buddhist culture in order that they might acculturate the Gospel more effectively. They were not motivated by an interest in, or respect for, the culture for its own sake.

Although the American Presbyterians were united in their affirmation of Thai Buddhist culture they held widely differing views on Thai Buddhism. APM's decision to encourage its personnel to develop a more irenic, explorative approach to Thai Buddhism eventuated in a diversity of theological appraisals of Thai Buddhism,

ranging from appreciation of the sincerity of Thai Buddhist spirituality to affirmation of Thai Buddhism as an efficient means of salvation for its devout practitioners. OMF missionaries strongly disagreed with the opinions espoused by some American Presbyterian missionaries. OMF, comprised of theologically conservative missionaries, considered the American Presbyterian missionaries' theology to be unacceptably liberal in orientation. It dismissed APM and the theological institutions established by the mission, in particular Thailand Theological Seminary, as theologically unsound and maintained a stance of independence toward APM/CCT. OMF missionaries believed that Thai Buddhism was significantly influenced by the demonic and were wary of any involvement with it. The study of Thai Buddhism was tolerated in so far as it contributed to the task of converting Buddhists to Christianity. The American Presbyterians persisted in pursuing an approach toward Thai Buddhism that was in conflict with the wishes of the Thai church, despite their decision to submit to the authority of CCT. OMF missionaries adopted a more negative approach toward Thai Buddhism but generated no explicit opposition from the ACTC.

2. An Analysis of the American Presbyterians' and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship Missionaries' Acculturation of Christianity in Relation to Bevans' Five Models of Contextualisation

American Presbyterian missionaries have embraced a diversity of theological approaches to inculturation and may be said to represent more than one model of contextualising theology. However, the dominant model practiced by American Presbyterians has been the synthetic model. In accordance with the synthetic model Presbyterians have implicitly affirmed that divine revelation, the Gospel, consists of propositional statements *and* may be identified with the active presence of God in history. Mission has been understood both as evangelism, the proclamation of propositional statements, and social action, demonstrating the active presence of God in history. Presbyterians have rejected the notion of a supra-cultural Gospel, accepting instead that the Gospel is culturally conditioned. They have actively encouraged a dialogue between different culturally conditioned expressions of the

Gospel. Rejecting the dichotomy between culture and religion has allowed them to pursue a dialogue with Thai Buddhism, as well as more religiously neutral elements of Thai culture. Accepting the active presence of God outwith the church has enabled them to take seriously the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture. On the whole the Presbyterians have relinquished responsibility for the dialogue to Thai Christians. However, they have repeatedly challenged CCT's antipathy toward Thai Buddhism and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

OMF missionaries have been united in their affirmation of the translation model. They have maintained that divine revelation, the Gospel, is supra-cultural, consisting of a number of propositions that may be decoded from the sending culture and encoded in the receiving culture. They have consistently prioritised evangelism, the communication of the supra-cultural message, and diligently applied themselves to the study of the Thai language, the medium of communication. They have pursued the study of Thai Buddhist culture, so far as it enhanced their acculturation of the Gospel, but paid scant attention to Thai Buddhism. Their reluctance to relinquish control of the Thai church and the development of Thai Christianity to Thai Christians discloses their belief that Western missionaries rather than Thai Christians should remain the principal custodians of the Gospel.

3. Mission History and Contemporary Indigenous Christianity

Part Two consists of a brief history of two missions in Thailand, APM and OMF, and a more detailed analysis of the theology of those missions as it relates to their attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. Part Three will explore the emergence of contemporary indigenous Christianity in the churches planted by those two missions. This thesis includes both mission history and an analysis of contemporary indigenous Christianity maintaining that the study of one enhances and complements the study of the other. Thus it contends and that the two, mission history and studies of contemporary Christianity, should not be divorced from one another. It will be shown that the history of the missions and understanding of the theological stance of the missions, explored in Part Two, serves to elucidate the study of indigenous Christianity that follows in Part Three. In particular the thesis will

analyse the degree to which mission theology influenced indigenous theology. That is, how far the missionaries' attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism influenced: the indigenous Christians' attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism; dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage; and inculturation of Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context. Thus the thesis will ask whether the positive appraisals of Thai Buddhist religious culture and the presence of an explicit dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, evident among American Presbyterians, has enabled Thai Christians in CCT to explore their relationship with their own cultural and religious heritage more effectively than Thai Christians in ACTC who have been exposed to more negative attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. Similarly the thesis will analyse the degree to which the OMF missionaries' unwillingness to examine the relationship between Christianity and Thai Buddhist culture/Thai Buddhism in any depth has discouraged Thai Christians in ACTC from exploring their relationship with their own cultural and religious heritage. Moreover, the thesis will ask how far Thai Christians, from both CCT and ACTC, have been able to develop their own indigenous response to their Thai Buddhist heritage, independent of and distinct from that of the associated mission.

PART THREE:

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THAILAND
AND THE ASSOCIATED CHURCHES OF
THAILAND – CENTRAL: INCULTURATING
CHRISTIANITY IN THE THAI BUDDHIST
CONTEXT**

***Part Three: The Church of Christ in Thailand and the
Associated Churches of Thailand - Central:
Inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist
Context***

Part Three will listen to the self-statement of a select group of Thai Christians on a number of issues that they raised in the course of the interviews. The thesis aims to discern how these Thai Christians interpret their Christian faith in the Thai context, in particular in relation to Thai Buddhist religious culture. The chapter seeks to assess the degree to which these Christians have consciously, or unconsciously, inculturated their Christian faith in the Thai Buddhist context. It sets out to understand the manner in which they have inculturated their faith in terms of external (explicit) or internal (implicit) dialogue with Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices, their Thai Christian heritage and post-war mission theology.

Chapter Seven: The Church of Christ in Thailand: Inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist Context

1. Introduction

Twenty-eight Thai Christians were selected from the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) for interview.¹ Given that the American Presbyterian missionary presence in post-war Thailand was centralised in Chiangmai, it was decided to restrict the sample geographically to the Northern province of Chiangmai. This increased the possibility of the church leaders selected having been exposed to post-war mission theology disseminated by American Presbyterian missionaries.² In the resulting sample twenty-two (85 percent) were currently engaged as full-time church pastors. Of those, thirteen had received a theological education and been ordained within CCT, while nine had received a theological education and were working as pastors within CCT, but had not been ordained within CCT. Two interviewees (8 percent) were working as chaplains for CCT: Pastor Marisa Ninlakun in McCormick Hospital; Pastor Suphaphorn Yarnsarn in Prince Royal College. Both McCormick Hospital and Prince Royal College are CCT institutions. Two interviewees (8 percent) were involved in theological education: Rev. Prakai Nontawasee had been involved in theological education at the Theological Faculty of Payap University for many years and was principal of the seminary immediately after Hamlin's retirement; Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit had also been principal of the seminary for a short period in

¹ Two of the interviews with CCT Christians were not included in the analysis in this chapter due to the poor quality of the tape. There are, however, occasional references to these interviews, one with Rev. Damrong Up-Ngan and the other with Dr. John Mark Thomthai.

² An increasing number of foreign missionary organisations have made the decision to work within CCT since the first missionary organisation, APM, was formally integrated into CCT in 1957. The principal interest in this thesis is with the post-war mission theology of the American Presbyterians. Although numerically the American Presbyterian presence has decreased rapidly in Thailand during the last twenty years the thesis contends that they have had a significant theological voice in post-war Thailand, particularly in theological education at the CCT seminary.

1995. At the time of interview he was working as Vice President of Student Affairs at Payap University.

All the interviewees had received a theological education at the Theology Faculty of Payap University where American Presbyterian missionaries were well represented on the faculty and, for most of the post-war period, an American Presbyterian had been principal. Two interviewees (8 percent), Rev. Somchit Huanaa and Pastor Suttichai Wuti, had attended the Christian Service Training Centre before studying at the Theology Faculty of Payap University.³ One interviewee, Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, had completed his first theology degree at the OMF Bible College, Phayao Bible College, and later enrolled at the Theology Faculty of Payap University. Three of the interviewees (12 percent) were female: Rev. Dr. Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons was a full-time pastor; Pastor Suphaphorn and Pastor Marisa were chaplains. The dominance of male leadership in CCT made it difficult to select more female interviewees.

Twenty-one of the Thai Christians interviewed (81 percent) were second and third-generation Christians. Only five of the Thai Christians interviewed (19 percent) were first-generation Christians: Rev. Chamnam Saengchai, Rev. Dr. Chuleepran, Pastor Kratsanai, Pastor Sanay Wangcharern and Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham were born and raised in Thai Buddhist homes and converted from Buddhism to Christianity. The majority of second and third-generation Christians in the sample reflects the strength of the Christian heritage in CCT in North Thailand. Six of the interviewees were between thirty and forty years old. Ten were between forty and fifty years old. Seven were between fifty and sixty years old. Three were over sixty years old.

³ The Christian Service Training Centre (CSTC) was a department of the Theology Faculty of Payap University. It was opened in 1961 and, unlike other departments within the Theology Faculty, accepted candidates who had not yet completed their secondary school education. It trained lay leaders for the churches. Some CSTC graduates chose to pursue their education at the Theology Faculty of Payap University in order that they might serve as ordained ministers within CCT.

The chapter will begin by exploring issues of the theological self-identity of CCT Christians, including an analysis of the interviewees' religious heritage and theological education, their involvement as Christians in Thai Buddhist culture, their understanding of how Buddhism may contribute to Thai Christianity, and their articulation of their Christian beliefs. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the data.

2. Issues of the theological self-identity of CCT Christians

A. A Christian Heritage and Theological Education

Many of the second and third-generation Christians interviewed had been raised in Christian villages and educated at Christian schools, their villages and schools having originated in the work of APM in North Thailand. The American Presbyterians' attitude towards Thai Buddhist culture at end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century has been well documented. Swanson has concluded that, "The mission believed that the animist/Buddhist faith (*sic*) of traditional society was 'idolatrous' and therefore an affront to the holiness and majesty of God."⁴ Although it is difficult to identify a distinctively Thai opinion from that of the Americans, the evidence suggests that those who chose to convert from Buddhism to Christianity during this period were expected to reject Buddhism and to cut themselves off from Thai Buddhist culture. Swanson argued that the missionaries "sought to alienate their converts from that society."⁵

The interviewees frequently referred to their Christian heritage during the interviews. Rev. Phongsak Sinthumat commented: "I was born into a Christian family; three generations on my mother's side were Christians."⁶ Rev. Prasaat Pansuay said: "I

⁴ Herbert R. Swanson, *Krischak Muang Nua: A Study in Northern Thai Church History* (Bangkok: Chuan Printing Press Ltd., 1984), 22.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rev. Phongsak Sinthumat, interview by C. R. Hillier, 9 March 1999, Chuangpaw, Chongthong, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by J. Tootill..

have been raised in a Christian circle since I was a child.”⁷ The interviewees’ Christian heritage meant that they were familiar with basic Christian beliefs and practices from a young age. Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun remarked that: “I have understood the fundamentals about God since I was a child.”⁸ The interviewees’ Christian heritage meant that their exposure to Buddhism was limited. One interviewee, who lived in an exclusively Christian community, had virtually no experience of Buddhism as a child. Others, who lived in religiously plural communities, and who had Buddhist relatives, had a little more experience of Buddhism.

Rev. Mana Duangsuwan grew up on the Christian farm in Chiangrai.⁹ In his interview he remarked:

I was a child from a Christian family, my grandmother and grandfather were Christians... I grew up in a Christian community, which had a big church, called the church at the farm in Chiangrai. It was a Christian village. It was a completely Christian village and the conditions of living there were those of a group of Christians living together in a Christian community. When I was a child I had never seen a Buddhist temple, I had always seen the church. I had never been part of any temple ceremonies or celebrations or had even seen any priests. It wasn’t until I was a teenager that I went outside the community with my friends and then I saw these things: Buddhist temples and Buddhist monks. But in our community we only had the church. I see this kind of background as being a good one as I was moulded by a Christian community. But there is a negative side to this. We didn’t know anything about the community surrounding ours at all.¹⁰

All the other interviewees had some contact with Thai Buddhist society. At a young age they became aware that they were part of a Christian minority in a predominately Buddhist country. Pastor Manit Khamlaphit said: “When I was a child I realised that

⁷ Rev. Prasaat Pansuay, interview by C. R. Hillier, 3 March 1999, Sangaban, Doi Saket, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by B. White..

⁸ Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun, interview by C. R. Hillier, 3 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by L. Belandres.

⁹ For details about the Chiangrai Farm see Chapter Three: 4. A. 2. c)., “Post Integration.”

¹⁰ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier, 9 March 1999, Ban Papont, Doi Saket, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by M. Cooke.

I was different from them [Buddhists].”¹¹ As children the interviewees were taught how to live in a religiously plural society. Pastor Marisa reflected on how her parents “did not say anything against the religion [Buddhism] but taught us how to live with our friends and those who had different beliefs. They would tell us what we could and could not do at a religious ceremony, in our community or at our school.”¹² The interviewees raised in Christian homes were prohibited from participating in many aspects of Thai Buddhist culture as children. Several interviewees reflected on their experiences as Christians in Buddhist schools. Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee recalled: “We [Christian students] went to the teacher and said that at the time of Buddhist prayers we would stand still but we would not pray like the others. I said this because my grandmother had taught me not to pray in that way.”¹³ Similarly Rev. Phongsak said:

I went to a Buddhist school and as a class leader I had to lead in worshipping Buddha. But I refused. I was told ‘when in Rome, do as in Rome.’ That is what people would say. I have no answer to that. But I would not do it. I let the deputy class leader do it instead.¹⁴

The interviewees’ Christian heritage, and limited exposure to Buddhism, meant that their understanding of Buddhist beliefs and practices was limited. Rev. Phakdee’s comment is typical of many: “As I was raised in a Christian family I have no personal experience of Buddhism. I only know about it through books I have read. If I ever try to explain Buddhism no one will understand because I come at it from the perspective of an outsider.”¹⁵ Rev. Mana remarked: “I don’t know much about what they [Buddhists] believe. It is an area of weakness for me. I would not be able to compare the two religions.”¹⁶

¹¹ Pastor Manit Khamlaphit, interview by C. R. Hillier, 18 March 1999, Muang Sen, Sansai, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier, 2 March 1999, Sansai, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by M. Cooke.

¹⁴ Rev. Phongsak Sinthumat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵ Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁶ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Despite their limited exposure to Buddhism and restricted involvement in Thai Buddhist culture eight interviewees (31 percent) spontaneously spoke about their relationships as Christians with their Buddhist neighbours. Five of these (19 percent) described these relationships in positive terms. Pastor Saattraa Buayen recalled how Christians and Buddhists in his village would meet together to celebrate their respective religious occasions:

In my community there were very good relationships between Christians and Buddhists. We were a small group but on Thanksgiving Day and Christmas they would join us...They wanted to join in with us and sometimes even came to church. If we had a funeral they would come and if they had a funeral we would go.¹⁷

Three interviewees (12 percent) recalled negative, rather than positive experiences of living in a religiously plural community. Commenting on his current experience as a pastor, Rev. Sanan Wuti said:

Most of my church members regard the Buddhists as being 'outsiders', and the Christians as the real 'Thai'. They see the Buddhists as not having salvation. They believe the Buddhists need to repent and to become Christians in order to obtain salvation. On the other hand the Buddhists regard the Christians as being 'outsiders', who are following the foreigners' religion...People can be quite unpleasant about it. For example some of the children from Christian families attend the temple school. They get jeered at. They are asked why they go to the temple school when they are Christians and why don't they go to the Christian school. There have been quarrels and even fights over it. Even in my own family religion has built a wall between my family and my father's other relations. At the same time we are seen as the poor relations. It has even been said that we are possessed by spirits. In the past this caused a lot of pain. In recent years we have tried to encourage the Christians to have better relationships with their non-Christian relatives and neighbours.¹⁸

Not all the Christians interviewed from CCT were second or third-generation Christians. Five interviewees (19 percent) came from Buddhist homes. However, all

¹⁷ Pastor Saattraa Buayen, interview by C. R. Hillier, 13 March 1999, Chomphu, Sarapee, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by A. Ellard.

¹⁸ Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier, 11 March 1999, Watket, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

five converted to Christianity as children or teenagers. Their early conversion to Christianity meant that their involvement with Buddhism was limited. None of the CCT interviewees had been ordained into the Buddhist priesthood prior to their conversion to Christianity. Despite their comparatively limited exposure to Buddhism each CCT interviewee who converted from Buddhism to Christianity admitted that their conversion to Christianity involved jettisoning Buddhism. Pastor Kratsanai, who converted at the age of fifteen years, reflected: "I made a decision about all these things, including cutting off those things that I used to worship and venerate including images and evil spirits."¹⁹ Rev. Dr. Chuleepran, who started attending Sunday school at the church at a young age, recollected the tension her own conversion to Christianity, and rejection of Buddhism, created in her Buddhist home. She recalled:

I was so confused about myself and how to relate to Buddhists. My relationship with my family was up and down during that time. My family was living a normal life but I was the one who tried to change them. For example, there would be spirit worship and ancestor worship. My family would come together, but I never attended. I was not interested in them. I would say that this is the meeting of Satan and the devil. That was how painful my words were.²⁰

All the interviewees, from both Buddhist and Christian backgrounds, attended the Theology Faculty of Payap University founded by the American Presbyterian Mission. The seminary challenged the students to think through their understanding of their Christian heritage and, in particular, their understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism. Many found this immensely difficult. Pastor Yothin Khampheera reflected on the struggles some students experienced at the seminary:

We had always been told that if we studied theology it would build up our faith, but as time went by I heard people say that it made their heads ache! Some said that they had lost their faith, or that their faith had become

¹⁹ Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, interview by C. R. Hillier, 10 March 1999, Banthi, Sarapee, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by H. Breidenthal.

²⁰ Rev. Dr. Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons, interview by C. R. Hillier, 5 March 1999, Patan, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by Wannapa Reong.

weak... There were many things that disturbed our faith and some people were not able to cope.²¹

It is evident from Rev. Sanan's interview that the seminary's approach to theological education was controversial amongst Thai Christians in CCT. He recalled:

Before I went there [the Theology Faculty of Payap University] there were many people, including one of my friends in the Chiangmai church, who warned me about these things and suggested that I would do better to study at Phayao [Phayao Bible College]. He had a place to study at the seminary but thought the teaching was incorrect and so went to Phayao.²²

When asked if it was just his friend who spoke this way, Rev. Sanan replied: "No, there were other adults who felt that the department of theology [the Theology Faculty of Payap University] was not right in its teaching."²³ Asked if there was any truth in what his friend said, Rev. Sanan replied:

There was some truth in it. But I feel that the important thing is to have our own basis and stick to it. It is not necessary to follow everything that is taught.... In order to study we have to have the ability to open our hearts wide, to gain knowledge. But in the end we have to make up our own minds about what we believe and follow. My aim was to study in order to gain a wide knowledge. I think that this was a good thing, even though some people considered it to be too wide. I learnt to think deeply for myself before I made up my mind on an issue and followed it.²⁴

Two of the interviewees (8 percent) spoke specifically about the faculty's interests in inter-religious dialogue. Rev. Prakai, who succeeded John Hamlin as principal of the seminary, recalled:

Francis Seely was interested in dialogue. He began to sell his ideas at the seminary. But he was looked at suspiciously by both Thai and foreigners. They were afraid of syncretism... CCT was divided... I was in agreement with Francis but many others were afraid. They fear Buddhism. They fear the smell of Buddhism.²⁵

²¹ Pastor Yothin Khampheera, interview by C. R. Hillier, 8 March 1999, Banpaen, Lamphun, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

²² Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rev. Prakai Nontawasee, interview by Patricia McLean, 22 April 1999, Chiangmai..

Later on in the interview Rev. Prakai commented that the seminary's practice of inviting Buddhist priests in to speak to the students was one way of breaking down that wall of fear. Rev. Prakai commented: "After the students have talked to the Buddhist priests at the seminary it helps. It reduces the fear of Buddhism. It begins the dialogue."²⁶

Rev. Dr. Pradit, Principal of the Theology Faculty of Payap University for a short period in 1995, also spoke about CCT's response to inter-religious dialogue:

Today there is more openness and acceptance of inter-religious cooperation...Overall I think that the churches can work very closely with others of other faiths, but only at a surface level. When you go deeper into the doctrinal level, ritual level, there is still a big gap. But on the surface level there are no obstacles to living and working together. But don't touch the doctrines, rites, rituals. Not because they are against each other, but because Christians and Buddhists do not understand their own core teachings; they only understand the surface level of their own religion. When they go deeper they are afraid that they will lose their faith. This means that both the Christians and the Buddhists need to teach, very intensively, about their own understanding of religion, faith, doctrine and practice, back to the basics of each religion. When we understand what we believe, then we can work together in a very productive way rather than be sceptical of one another, or not trusting one another. There is no problem at an intellectual level and no problem with the common people. But in the middle there is a problem, if you touch something that is sensitive to their own identity, such as what they teach or believe. But generally CCT is more open to dialogue to working together with people of other religions.²⁷

However, when Rev. Damrong Up-Ngan, a member of the CCT Department of Evangelism, was asked about his attitude towards inter-religious dialogue he contended:

We [members of the Department of Evangelism] think that it is dangerous to do that. It is OK for those at the seminary. But when we talk to the people who have not studied at the seminary, they do not understand. Some people say that we do not need to evangelise anymore because every religion is good and everyone goes to God. This is what the students at McGilvary [the Theology

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takergrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean..

Faculty of Payap University] and people in the church say. But not everyone on the faculty at McGilvary agree.²⁸

The interviewees thus reflect a range of theological views. While most had been raised in theologically conservative homes and churches, their theological education had made them aware of alternative theological opinions. The data suggests that post-war mission theology disseminated by American Presbyterian missionaries, in particular innovative approaches to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism, has had a significant influence among CCT Christians. Those interviewed had been made aware of different theological positions, particularly those originating with the American Presbyterian missionaries, were willing to listen to and engage with the issues involved and in many cases able to articulate their own response to the opinions espoused by American Presbyterian missionaries.

B. Christian Involvement in Thai Buddhist Culture

The data generated from the interviews suggests that the CCT Christians interviewed drew a distinction between culture and religion. Discussing what a Christian may and may not do at a Buddhist funeral Pastor Yothin commented: "I think that you have to make a clear distinction between what is Thai custom and manners and what is part of a Buddhist ceremony."²⁹ However, interviewees were unable to agree which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture are cultural and therefore legitimate for Christian participation, as distinct from religious and therefore unacceptable in terms of Christian involvement. Rev. Dr. Pradit remarked:

Yes, there is still uncertainty. The church should take responsibility for discussing these issues with Christians. They should identify what is the real core of being a Christian and separate culture, tradition, and belief in Thailand. At the moment the Thai mix them all up. They are not able to say that this is Thai culture, or this is Thai religion.³⁰

²⁸ Rev. Damrong Up-Ngan, interview by Patricia McLean, 16 May 1999, Department of Evangelism, Chiangmai.

²⁹ Pastor Yothin Khamphera, interview by C. R. Hillier.

³⁰ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

In face of such uncertainty and confusion, Pastor Uthit Ariyaat insisted that it was not his responsibility as a pastor to give explicit advice to Christians about what they could and could not do. Instead, he advises Christians to work out for themselves what they will and will not do at any Buddhist occasion. He urges them to follow their own consciences rather than his specific directions as pastor. He acknowledged, however, that:

Sometimes there have been problems after an event. People come back from the event and, after thinking about it, feel they haven't done the right thing. They feel discouraged. They usually come and talk about it with me. I try to encourage them. I go through it all with them. I tell them not to be disheartened. I encourage them that there will be other opportunities and they need to think through what they did this time and decide what they will do differently next time.³¹

When discussing how Thai Christians may be involved in Thai Buddhist culture, ten of the interviewees (39 percent) spoke about the importance of the community, as a factor in decision making. The interviewees argued that Thai Christians need to be sensitive to their Christian brothers and sisters, and not give them cause to doubt their faith; they were also aware of the importance of being sensitive to their Buddhist neighbours, and honouring their relationships with them. Rev. Sanan contended that nothing a Christian did, or did not do, would affect their relationship with God, but that it did have the potential to affect the faith of fellow Christians. He said: "I think that if we are in a living relationship with God, what happens outwardly is not that important, but I do feel that we have to be careful that what we do isn't a stumbling stone for others."³² Rev. Somchit Huanaa argued that more problems had been caused by Christians withdrawing from Thai Buddhist culture than by participating in it:

I have seen both: Christians who will have nothing to do with Buddhism and with their Buddhist neighbours; and Christians who willingly attend all the

³¹ Pastor Uthit Ariyaat, interview by C. R. Hillier, 15 March 1999, Sarapee, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

³² Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Buddhist ceremonies. In my experience those who withdraw cause more problems for themselves and for the church than those who participate.³³

Reflecting in more detail on these issues, all the interviewees agreed that it was acceptable for a Christian to *wai* a monk as a sign of respect. Beyond this, Rev. Dr. Pradit argued that Christians should also offer rice to the Buddhist monk as a means of *tham bun*, and gave merit-making a Christian interpretation:

Tham bun is to contribute for others to live. You don't give directly to God but you give to others so that God would be pleased with what you have done. I would give to the monk too, because they don't have anything to eat. With the old monk I would be happy to give and *wai* out of respect, because he is worthy of respect. He is an elderly man who has lived an honest life. He has not harmed anyone and is concentrating on a better life. So I *wai* him, but not because he is the way to heaven.³⁴

Having already drawn a distinction between religion and culture, Rev. Dr. Pradit's discussion of *tham bun* indicates that he is willing to condone participation in strictly religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture by radically reinterpreting the Buddhist practice within the Christian context. Confirming this point, he argued: "I don't think the Buddhists do anything that Christians cannot also do. Christians should do everything the Buddhists do, but give the Buddhist practices a Christian interpretation."³⁵

All of the CCT Christians interviewed believed that Thai Christians could attend the Buddhist temple, and argued that this helps promote good relationships between Buddhists and Christians. When the interviewees spoke about visiting Buddhist temples they repeatedly emphasised the need for Christians to show respect to the people at the temple and the rituals they follow. Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad's comment is typical of many:

³³ Rev. Somchit Huanaa, interview by C. R. Hillier, 12 March 1999, Nai Muang, Lamphun, tape recording, translated by J. Davis.

³⁴ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁵ Ibid.

We reckon that it is not our own house, but belongs to someone else. When we go to another person's house we must respect it; the one they worship is like a father to them, we must respect their father. I have a father, you have a father and if I respect my father when I go to my house but don't respect your father when I come to your house, that is bad... We respect what they worship in the temple, but it is not our father, our father is the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁶

Discussing what Christians could and could not participate in at the Buddhist temple, four interviewees (15 percent) commented that it is important for Christians to listen to the Buddhist monk's teaching at the temple. Pastor Suphaphorn Yarnsarn said: "We can go and hear the monks preaching, they may provide some good teaching."³⁷ Two interviewees (8 percent) remarked that Christians could participate by joining in the meditation at the temple. They believed that *wai*-ing while the monks are preaching and participating in the mediation is one way Christians can show their respect to their Buddhist neighbours and to Buddhism. Rev. Prakai said: "If you go and *wai* the priest, or sit still and meditate, it is a way of giving reverence to all people. It is a way of giving reverence to everyone in the temple."³⁸ However, not all those who were willing to attend the Buddhist temple were ready to agree that it was appropriate for Christians to participate in the Buddhist worship in this way. Rev. Wicha argued that "Christians can be with the monks but should not *wai* them". He said: "When the monks are chanting I never *wai*, I sit controlled and still. They know I am a Christian."³⁹

Rev. Khunakorn was alone in arguing that Christians could participate in the Buddhist merit-making activities at the temple. He believed that Christians can reinterpret merit-making practices within the Christian context in a similar way to Rev. Dr. Pradit's reinterpretation of the practice of giving rice to the monks. He

³⁶ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier, 4 March 1999, Banwaen, Hangdong, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

³⁷ Pastor Suphaphorn Yarnsarn, interview by C. R. Hillier, 18 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

³⁸ Rev. Prakai Nontawasee, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁹ Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham, interview by C. R. Hillier, 12 March 1999, Watket, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

contended that it is not simply acceptable to participate in this way but that it is wrong not to. He argued:

Suppose there is a religious ceremony such as presenting the robes to the monks, or a funeral when there is an opportunity to make merit. You can go and take part. Suppose there is an offering of money at such a ceremony, you can give because they use the money for making roads, or for a much needed shelter, a reading room, or a library. If you don't join in giving it is sinful. They are not using the money to make something evil but something good.⁴⁰

Rev. Khunakorn justified his participation in merit-making practices at the temple by contending that "When I have taken part I don't consider it to be *tham bun*, but as having fellowship with the local people so that we can be a cohesive part of society."⁴¹

It is evident that the CCT interviewees were willing to consider participating in Thai Buddhist culture. They drew a distinction between religion and culture in order to encourage maximum Christian participation in Thai Buddhist culture but were also willing to explore ways in which Christians might participate in Thai Buddhist religious culture. Those who believed Christians should participate more fully in Thai Buddhist religious culture argued that such participation would contribute to establishing better relationships between Buddhists and Christians and would be a way in which Christians might learn more about Buddhism and how Buddhism might contribute to Thai Christianity.

C. Thai Buddhism's Contribution to Thai Christianity

The positive attitude towards Thai Buddhist culture that emerged in the interviews with CCT Christians enabled many of them to explore how Buddhism might contribute to Christianity. Seventeen interviewees (65 percent) openly reflected on what Thai Christians could gain from Buddhism. Five interviewees (19 percent) contended that they had much to learn from their Buddhist neighbours about living as a community. Rev. Dr. Chuleepran related this directly to the Buddhist teaching

⁴⁰ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier. Thai Buddhists consider presenting the robes to the monks and giving financially to the temple to be a means of the giver making merit for themselves.

⁴¹ Ibid.

about community life: “Buddha taught so much about sacrifice and living together, so many things that are useful and we can apply.”⁴² Pastor Kratsanai reflected on the quality of Buddhist family life, commenting: “I think the Christian should have a heart that will help others. I have seen how the Buddhist people work together, as a family.”⁴³ Rev. Mana spoke about the inclusive character of the Buddhist community, comparing it to the exclusivity that he finds in the Christian community:

We have built our own wall. We protect ourselves and defend ourselves so that no one else can join in with us. I see that this point should be changed. It is our understanding that we are better than other people because we are Christians. I want to say that that is not so.⁴⁴

Seven of the CCT interviewees (27 percent) argued that Thai Christians should learn from the Buddhist attitude towards giving. Pastor Kratsanai contended that Buddhists are more generous than Christians: “The Christian will be slow to give but the Buddhist will give.”⁴⁵ He added, when “the Buddhist gives something away he does so with a full heart, an honest heart.”⁴⁶ Rev. Thongkham recognised this willingness as evidence of faith, commenting that Buddhists are “faithful to what they believe.”⁴⁷ In this he sees a challenge to Christians to show their faith in a similar way.

Four interviewees (15 percent) spoke about how Christianity might be enriched by the Buddhist teachings. Two (8 percent) admitted that they use Buddhist teaching to supplement their own understanding and articulation of Christianity. Rev. Khunakorn’s, for example, said: “I have used Buddhist teaching. I like to hear the monks *suad* [can mean chanting, reading or prayers], and I preach with Thai words that they [Buddhists] know.”⁴⁸ Rev. Khunakorn went on to illustrate how he uses Buddhist teaching to expound on the Christian teaching about wealth. He explained

⁴² Rev. Dr. Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴³ Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁴ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁵ Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁸ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

that Buddhism teaches about three different kinds of wealth; people, possessions, wisdom and knowledge. He argued that a Christian needs all three kinds of wealth, but that no amount of wealth can save. He uses the Buddhist teaching as a foundation to expound on the Christian teaching about wealth

Six interviewees (23 percent) discussed how Christian worship might be enhanced by Buddhist practices. Pastor Yothin contended that, "In the CCT churches of the first district they make it a practice of taking old Thai customs which come from the Buddhist background and bringing them into the church."⁴⁹ He remarked that Thai music and Thai dancing, that had previously been rejected by Christian missionaries as 'Buddhist', are now readily accepted in CCT. Pastor Yothin discussed how the Thai custom of *wai-ing* might be used more widely in the church:

Yes, there are many things that I am trying to encourage Christians to take and use. I think that sometimes our worship is lacking, I would like to see people use the Thai custom of sitting reverently with their hands in the position of prayer, to *wai*. People have many different opinions, but sometimes I feel that we are loosing our old courtesy.⁵⁰

When the interviewer asked him if the custom of *wai-ing* was 'Buddhist' or 'Thai' he said that the practice was Thai but widely used in Buddhist worship:

I have had the opportunity of visiting a temple and I have seen them do this and I would like to introduce this into the church... *Wai-ing* has the meaning of showing reverence and respect. It shows worship to someone who is greater than us.⁵¹

Pastor Picharn Chaithi was alone in contending that the Buddhist practice of meditating is something that Christians could adopt into their worship. In his interview he argued: "Let us quieten our hearts and meditate for a while, not in the same way as the Buddhists, but by thinking about God."⁵²

⁴⁹ Pastor Yothin Khamphera, interview by C. R. Hillier. CCT is divided into nineteen Presbyteries that are referred to as 'districts' (*phaks*). The first district consists of Bangkok. The province of Chiangmai, which includes Chiangmai city, is in the second district.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Pastor Picharn Chaithi, interview by C. R. Hillier, 16 March 1999, Nongpa Khrang, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by Wannapa Reong.

Three interviewees (12 percent) discussed how the Buddhist practice of walking in procession to the temple might be imaginatively used by Christians. Pastor Uthit recounted his experience of trying to introduce the practice while serving as pastor of a church in Chiangrai:

In the second division in the Chiangrai church we have an annual Thanksgiving Service when people bring gifts of vegetables and other produce to the church. There was one church that wanted to form a procession and to carry their produce to the church. Lots of people were upset and said it was not right and could not be done. But what could possibly be wrong with that?⁵³

Two interviewees (8 percent) talked about the possible Christian use of the Thai Buddhist wedding rituals. Pastor Uthit reflected on his hopes for his own wedding: “I am a Lanna Thai and I would like to be married in a Lanna ceremony. But this would meet with opposition from many Christians in CCT.”⁵⁴ The accepted way to be married in CCT is the “modern”, or “foreign” way. Pastor Uthit explained:

There are a number of things they [CCT Christians] are not willing to receive for example the Thai custom of tying the couple’s hands together with thread. This is not done in church. Christians are not able to do this. This means that we are denying our old culture. It is like the parallel that you just used about following the old buffalo cart tracts. This custom really belonged to the Thai people.⁵⁵

Eight of the interviewees (31 percent) spoke about the Christian adaptation of Thai Buddhist festivals, especially Songkran and Loi Krathong. They agreed that

⁵³ Pastor Uthit Ariyaat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Lanna is the name of the north Thai kingdom that emerged in the 13th century. It was conquered by the Burmese in 1558 and remained under Mon-Burmese rule for two hundred years before being liberated. Shortly after it became a vassal state of Bangkok and was gradually integrated into Siam/Thailand (Saeng Chandrangaam, “Lanna Thai Kingdom and Its Religion” in Saeng Chandrangaam and Narujohn Iddhichiracharas (eds), *Buddhism in Northern Thailand*, Published to Commemorate the 13th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists at Chiangmai, Thailand, 1980 (Chiangmai, Thippanetra Publishing, 1980), 87).

⁵⁵ Ibid. The reference to ‘old buffalo cart tracts’ eludes to the Thai practice of using the tracts of earlier buffalo drawn carts to negotiate the way over a rough terrain.

Songkran may be celebrated in the Christian church as the opportunity to honour the older members of the congregation in a uniquely Thai manner. Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri contended:

Songkran in the church is different to how Buddhists practice it. We try to adapt Songkran just as the Jewish Christians adapted Passover. We use water to wash the hands of the elders, just as oil is used in the Bible, as a symbol of cleansing and setting apart. So the Asians use water as a symbol of cleansing. We pour water on the hands of the older members of the congregation to show respect to them.⁵⁶

Rev. Dr. Pradit contended that Christians are right to adopt this Thai festival because the Christian scriptures also teach respect for your elders, which he believes is the essence of the Thai festival.⁵⁷

There was less consensus over whether Christians may or may not adopt the Thai festival of Loi Krathong. There was disagreement over what the festival used to mean, means now, and how it may be re-interpreted by Christians. Pastor Thiraphong remarked that he challenges his Christian students to think through the issues for themselves:

I want them to think the issues through for themselves. Is the Loi Krathong festival only a cultural festival or does it involve evil spirits? If they think it is only a cultural festival, where we thank God for the river that He (*sic*) created for us and reminds us that we should care for the waterways, then I don't oppose it. I'm not advocating that people participate in the Loi Krathong festival by floating banana boats down the river. I only want to prompt my students to think about the issues.⁵⁸

Those who are in favour of a more open approach to the use of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices by Thai Christians argued that Thai Christianity needs to become less foreign and more Thai. However, the resistance Pastor Uthit has met to the inclusion of aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in the church persuaded him that, "To change what we have received from the foreigners to something that is 100 percent Thai

⁵⁶ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier, 16 March 1999, Paphai, Sansai, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by L. Belandres.

⁵⁷ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁵⁸ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

would be very difficult.”⁵⁹ Those who are in favour of adapting Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices also argued that Thai Christians need to involve themselves more deeply in Thai Buddhist culture in order not to cut themselves off from their heritage and wider community. Pastor Yothin made this point particularly clearly:

I feel that we cannot just cut these things out. Thai Christians need to build relationships with Thai Buddhists and we need to use the things that belong to our common heritage to bind us together. You cannot just ask new Christians to throw away all that is Thai. They still have their own relationships within the old Thai community. They value the cultural practices which are beautiful in themselves.⁶⁰

However, while a majority of interviewees were in favour of appropriating more Buddhist beliefs and practices into the church, a significant minority were quite strongly opposed to this practice. Nine interviewees (35 percent) were unable to speak positively about how CCT might appropriate more beliefs and practices from Thai Buddhist culture. Seven interviewees (27 percent) spoke negatively about Thai Buddhism. Four (15 percent) argued that it is inappropriate to incorporate aspects of Thai Buddhism into Thai Christianity because Buddhism in Thailand has been critically distorted by Thai Buddhists absorption of other religious practices, such as Brahmanism, spirits, and astrology. Pastor Kratsanai remarked: “There is not much that is real Buddhism. Most of it is magical arts, chants, and involvement in evil spirits.”⁶¹ Pastor Manit commented: “Thai people are infatuated with new and strange things. They don’t genuinely adhere to Buddhism.”⁶² Rev. Boonma Wannalai said: “They say they follow Buddhism. But it is not Buddhism. They worship spirits.”⁶³ These interviewees’ negative responses were, however, directed against the form that Buddhism has taken in Thailand rather than what they identify as pure Buddhism. Only three interviewees (12 percent) argued that it is inappropriate to

⁵⁹ Pastor Uthit Ariyaat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁰ Pastor Yothin Khampheera, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶¹ Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶² Pastor Manit Khamlaphit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶³ Rev. Boonma Wannalai, interview by C. R. Hillier, 2 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by M Cooke..

incorporate any elements of Thai Buddhism into Thai Christianity simply because Buddhism was wrong in essence.

Two interviewees (8 percent) argued against the incorporation of Thai Buddhist practices into CCT on other grounds, namely that Buddhism, while arguably good in itself, has been replaced by something that is better. Rev. Prasaat described Buddhism as “good-news for the Thai people,”⁶⁴ and said that it was “in part what God has done for Thailand.”⁶⁵ He described the Buddhist teaching as “a law of righteousness.”⁶⁶ But when asked in what way Buddhism might contribute to Christianity he said: “I feel that there are so many practices and laws, it [Buddhism] is like the Old Testament, you have to do this, you can’t do that. We [Thai Christians] now realise that we cannot keep the law [Buddhist]. Buddhists also realise that they cannot keep the laws. So we shouldn’t try to accommodate.”⁶⁷

The presence of a significant number of interviewees who explicitly oppose a fuller appropriation of Thai Buddhist culture by Thai Christianity indicates that there are still Thai Christians in CCT who are wary of moving beyond the usual community boundaries between Christians and Buddhists. This perhaps reflects the continuing struggle of Thai Christians to establish their identity in a predominately Buddhist context. Certainly some interviewees feel that the Catholics, who have been more willing to incorporate aspects of Thai Buddhist culture into their practice of Christianity, are in danger of losing their identity.⁶⁸ Pastor Picharn commented:

⁶⁴ Rev. Prasaat Pansuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Since the Second Vatican Council Catholics in Thailand have actively endeavoured to appropriate aspects of Thai Buddhism. This has included churches designed to resemble Buddhist temples, the use of tunes based on Buddhist chants, joss sticks, and flower garlands in worship, as well as many other traditionally Thai religious practices. Most Protestant denominations have condemned the Catholic adaptation of Buddhism and there has been a strong negative reaction from the national Buddhist authorities. See: Venerable Phra Sobhon-Ganabhorn, *A Plot to Undermine Buddhism* (Bangkok: Svra Phora, 1984).

The Catholics are trying to use the Thai culture in their worship service in ways I cannot accept. In the funeral service, they light candles and joss sticks, which I don't agree with. I think that what the Catholics are doing is making Christianity and Buddhism look just the same. Christianity won't look any different from Buddhism.⁶⁹

The rapidity of cultural change in Thailand also contributes to the uncertainty over these issues. For example Rev. Dr. Pradit contended: "We [Thai Christians] are so overwhelmed by Western Christianity that it is hard to think about what is Thai, what is really Thai in us. We are very Westernised. We have everything, but what is our real heritage?"⁷⁰ When asked if there was any benefit in endeavouring to recapture the past, he replied: "Some things are good and should be reclaimed, some things can be forgotten because they do not make sense to this era. Some can be preserved and some forgotten."⁷¹

In Rev. Somchit's interview he also commented on the affect of rapid cultural change on the church:

The context within Thailand has changed considerably, now there is a mix of cultures from the West and the East, both Christian and Buddhist. The young people today are prepared to celebrate Christmas and Valentine's Day, they go out on dates together, they even get married while they are still studying. In Thai culture this would not happen. As far as dress is concerned, ladies wear swimming suites and short skirts. This shows a mixing up of cultures that we find unacceptable, but we have to accept this. I personally cannot accept that students in the seminary will dye their hair red. I cannot accept this, but when we talk to them, they just say that this is the culture we live in. We were born twenty years ago, we have thoughts and ideas of twenty years ago and they are not the same. We are not prepared to accept the new culture. Taking the gospel into this new culture is very difficult. How can we do it? This is a great challenge, how can we hold on to a model that would allow us to change without the nature of the original gospel changing? This requires new methodologies that will reach everybody.⁷²

⁶⁹ Pastor Picharn Chaithi, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁰ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Rev. Somchit Huanaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Most of the interviewees consider the Christian church in Thailand to be ‘foreign’, and opposed to Thai Buddhist culture. They believe that the church must become less foreign and more Thai. They also believe that the church must cultivate a new approach to Thai Buddhism. However, a significant minority resist change. The existence of both traditional and innovative opinions indicates that as a Christian community CCT Christians are still in the process of re-evaluating their Christian heritage. Their minority status as Christians in a predominately Buddhist country, as well as the rapid cultural change that is occurring in Thailand, exacerbates the struggle for a Christian identity.

D. Articulation of Christian Beliefs

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to reporting and analysing the interviewees’ understanding of key Christian doctrines that disclose the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism in general, with specific attention to major cosmological themes associated with Buddhism: *kamma*, merit, and spiritual patronage, in particular. The aim is to demonstrate how the interviewees’ perception of God, obedience, and spirits relates to the Buddhist understanding of spiritual patronage, and how their perception of sin and salvation relates to the Buddhist understanding of *kamma* and merit. It will be argued in conclusion that, despite their limited personal experience of Thai Buddhism, the interviewees’ understanding of Christianity is significantly influenced by their Buddhist heritage.

1. God

Most of the interviewees had been brought up in Christian homes and taught that God, *phracaw*, was the creator. Thus the Christian teaching about the creator-God had not had the same impact on them that it had on first-generation Christians who heard the Gospel for the first time as adults.⁷³ Only three Christians interviewed from CCT (12 percent) specifically spoke about God as the creator. However, fifteen interviewees from CCT (58 percent) spoke more generally about God as spirit and discussed how God, as spirit, relates to the spirit world of North Thailand. Rev.

⁷³ Compare the way in which first-generation Christians in ACTC articulated their Christian beliefs, Chapter Eight: 2. D. 1., “God.”

Boonma, who referred to God as the creator, contended that Christians offer Buddhists 'God' instead of their 'spirits'. According to this view Buddhists "need to understand who God is, that He (*sic*) is the creator and the sustainer of their lives. Most people in the North believe in sacred things. We offer them God in the place of their sacred things."⁷⁴ When Pastor Suttichai was asked about how he would explain his Christian faith to a Thai Buddhist, he said that he would begin by explaining who God is, and would describe God as a spirit; he would begin by asking enquirers whether or not they believed in spirits and then go on to challenge them: "If you believe in spirits why don't you believe in God, because God is a spirit?"⁷⁵ Pastor Yothin said that when he talks to Buddhists about God he does not use the Christian word for God, *phracaw*, but will refer to 'God' as "all the sacred things in the universe (*sing sung sut*)."⁷⁶ 'All the sacred things in the universe' is inclusive of spirits, gods, or sacred things. Rev. Phakdee said:

The Thai people believe that a good spirit is an angel. A bad spirit is one that tries to destroy people. The neutral spirit is like a god. If we take care of it [the neutral spirit], it will give us blessing. But if we treat it badly then it will get angry and hurt us. The Thai people weren't sure what to call the neutral spirit so they named it 'the one who is all powerful and is over all the earth'. This belief comes from Buddhism. Thai people believe in mysterious powers. So when we try to tell them about God, it is not new to them. They know of the neutral spirit who is the most powerful of all, who created the world, and can mediate salvation. If we try to explain that to them they will understand. We can say that this is the God who we are trying to tell them about.⁷⁷

2. Obedience

Not only did the interviewees describe God as a spirit, but they related to God in a similar way to that in which Thai Buddhists relate to the spirits. The vows they made with God, as Christians, are similar to those they would have been familiar making with the spirits as Buddhists. The vows which Buddhists make with the spirits involve the worshippers proposing their terms of contract to the spirit. Commonly the

⁷⁴ Rev. Boonma Wannalai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁵ Pastor Suttichai Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier, 15 March 1999, Paphai, Sanasai, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by G. Kay.

⁷⁶ Pastor Yothin Khamphera, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁷ Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun, interview by C. R. Hillier.

worshipper declares that if the spirit will fulfil their wishes, they will in return and make an offering to the spirit.⁷⁸ Eight interviewees (31 percent) openly admitted to having initiated a contract with God that involved them making a vow. Some asked God for healing, some for academic success, and one asked to be spared military duty. All made a promise to God that if their requests were met they would offer their lives in service to God.

Rev. Thongkham recalled an episode of breathlessness during which he and his mother cried out to God for healing:

I couldn't breathe. I thought I would die. Then my mother said, 'Please quiet yourself and I will pray'. I wanted to sit still but I couldn't. I was terribly restless. Then my mother put her hand on my head and asked God to help her child. She prayed, 'If it is God's will to use my child then may God cause his symptoms to subside and for him to be able to breathe so that he would be able to rest and sleep.' Only a few minutes after that I improved, and after about ten minutes I said, 'Mother, you can go back to bed because I am alright now.' I slept and in the morning I went to the hospital. When I got back from the hospital I sat and prayed. It was truly a special time for me. I said to God, 'Dear God, please use me. Here I am.'⁷⁹

Reflecting on his decision to serve God as a pastor, Rev Thongkham said: "It was a promise of mine to God after I was healed."⁸⁰

Pastor Saattraa described the difficulties he was having with the academic work at seminary. "In my third module I got an 'F' grade twice. If I got an 'F' another time I would have to go back to the fields. God and I knew that if I were to pass then I would be a servant of God."⁸¹ Pastor Saattraa went on to pass his exams and to enter the ministry. Looking back on his experiences he explained: "When I had made a promise to God, and God had answered my prayers, I did not need anyone to tell me to go [into the ministry]. I was ready to serve the Lord. Now I have been serving the Lord for four years."⁸² Asked how far this episode influenced his decision to enter

⁷⁸ See Chapter One: 3., "Characteristics of Thai Buddhism."

⁷⁹ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Pastor Saattraa Buayen, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸² Ibid.

the ministry, he admitted it was “possibly the biggest factor.”⁸³ In a similar way Pastor Suphaphorn made a promise to God that if God would enable her to pass the entrance exams to Prince Royal College she would return and work at Prince Royal College after she had graduated. She prayed:

If there really is a God, if He (*sic*) will give me a chance in life when I am without any hope, if He (*sic*) will use me in the future, I will commit my life to God. I will return to Prince Royal College. If God will enable me to study here, then I will come back and work here. I will do everything, if this is God’s will.⁸⁴

At the time of the interview Pastor Suphaphorn had been working as chaplain at Prince Royal College for over twenty-five years.

Pastor Uthit decided to serve God after being spared military duty believing that God had miraculously released him from military service in response to his prayers:

When you draw lots for the draft, there are two colours, black and red. If you draw a red one you have to go into the army. If you draw a black one you have escaped the draft. I got a black one and did not have to become a soldier...When I came out I told her [my mother] that I didn’t have to be a soldier, but that I was going to be a soldier of Jesus Christ.⁸⁵

Commenting on the practice of making a promise to serve God in the church in return for a divine interaction, Rev. Phakdee said that many enter the ministry in order to fulfil vows they have made to God. He commented: “Sometimes they feel guilty that they have failed to fulfil their promise to God, and that God is therefore going to punish them.”⁸⁶

3. Spirits

Eleven interviewees (42 percent) compared the power of God to the power of the spirits. God is described as the spirit who has power over the spirits. Conversion to Christianity is understood to involve conversion from the spirits to the spirit,

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Pastor Suphaphorn Yarnsarn, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁵ Pastor Uthit Ariyaat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁶ Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun, interview by C. R. Hillier.

phracaw. The interviewees believe that allegiance to *phracaw* inevitably entails abandoning the propitiation of other spirits. However, it is evident that the spirits of Thai Buddhism still play a vital role in the lives of the Thai Christians. A few interviewees spoke about how they, or their parishioners, are unsure about how to understand, and relate to, the Thai Buddhist spirits. Many are still afraid of them. Rev. Khunakorn, from a Christian family, described his own fear of the spirits, recalling how he used to care for the ducks in the fields on Sunday: “Sometimes I was afraid because on Sundays I was alone, everyone else had gone to church. I was afraid of the spirits, not of people. Later I began to get used to them [spirits] and began not to fear them.”⁸⁷

It is evident that though Christians accept that, as Christians, they will not be harmed by the spirits, they are afraid that their Buddhist family may be harmed by the spirits. Rev Thongkham recalled an occasion when one of his congregation believed that his Buddhist wife and children were being molested by the spirits and had nearly died. He recollected how he was called out to the man’s home and had to

cast out the spirits by the power of God. Everyone took their Bibles and put them on their heads and we prayed for them with the laying on of hands. When we had finished they [wife and children] laid down, and vomited, and the spirits came out of them.⁸⁸

Rev. Boonma distinguished between ‘evil spirits’ and ‘spirits of the dead’. He argued that many Christians in his congregation are willing to stop propitiating the evil spirits but not to desist from their propitiation of the spirits of their dead ancestors. Rev. Boonma insisted that those who want to convert from Buddhism to Christianity must be willing to desist from all spirit propitiation. He argued that unless they are willing to jettison all involvement with the spirits they are not able to convert to Christianity. Rev. Boonma contended that some Christians in CCT still maintain a relationship with the spirits. He recalled: “I have seen a man who had responsibilities in the church, and every time his work became difficult, he would swear to the spirits

⁸⁷ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁸ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

to make things better. Sometimes he would present gifts to the spirits as well.”⁸⁹

Although Rev. Boonma explained that this extent of involvement with the spirits was extremely rare he did argue that other Christians were involved with the spirits to a lesser degree: “Not very many will swear to the spirits. But a few will go to the exorcist if they feel that the hospital cannot help them.”⁹⁰ In his interview he described how Christians would go to the exorcist and then return to the church to ‘repent’ before God.

The predominant Christian understanding of the spirits of Thai Buddhism is that they are evil and related to the principal evil spirit, Satan. Rev. Boonma’s understanding is typical:

The locals believe that there are evil spirits, but their beliefs are not the same as the Christians. The Christians believe that evil spirits come from Satan who is fighting against God. The local people believe that the evil spirits come from the dead.⁹¹

Pastor Manit’s comment reflects a similar understanding: “We desire that those who are Buddhist, and also worship the spirits, will get out of this power of darkness and enter into the power of the light of God.”⁹²

4. Sin

There are several Thai terms that may be used to refer to sin. The word *pit* denotes a mistake, or sinful action; it is used of minor wrongdoing and does not necessarily involve religious connotations. The word *baab* refers to more serious offences. Seely maintains that the term is always used with religious connotations to denote acts against a natural moral order which generate demerit.⁹³ Demerit influences one’s fate with inevitable consequences in this life, life after death, and future lives. The word *weenkam* is used to refer more specifically to an individual’s adverse fate.

⁸⁹ Rev. Boonma Wannalai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Pastor Manit Khamlaphit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹³ Seely, “Some Problems in Translating the Scriptures in Thai,” 49.

Buddhist beliefs about sin are intimately related to the Buddhist teaching about cause and effect. Buddhism believes in the existence of an ideal moral order within which good is rewarded with good and evil with evil. This Buddhist principle is evident in the popular Thai saying; 'do good, get good, do evil, get evil' (*tham dii daj dii, tham chua daj chua*). Chalor Roberts referred to the saying in her interview remembering her experiences at school:

The teacher used to take us to the temple in order to show us the pictures of the torments endured in hell. This made me terribly afraid of the punishment that awaited those who were evil. I believed the Buddhist teaching 'do good, get good, do evil, get evil.' As much as I could, I tried to be good.⁹⁴

The belief that good is rewarded with good and evil with evil meant that adverse circumstances in general, and ill health in particular, were interpreted as the consequence of sins committed in this life, or previous lives.

Christian missionaries adopted the term *baab* to translate sin. Although they endeavoured to redefine the term within a Christian context the word had little meaning to Thai people apart from its Buddhist context. One of the five CCT interviewees who came from a Buddhist background spontaneously admitted that he did not understand what Christians meant by sin when initially exposed to Christianity. Rev. Chamnarn said:

He [the missionary] said that everyone had sinned. I didn't know what 'sin' they were talking about. I didn't understand what it meant to be a sinner. I had never harmed any one or done anything wrong. The other boys thought that I was good, that it wasn't necessary for me to believe in God. I had never broken any of the school rules. While I was at the temple I had learnt to chant the prayers.⁹⁵

Three of the five CCT interviewees who came from a Buddhist background did not recall what their initial understanding of sin was or whether or not they identified themselves as sinners when they converted to Christianity. Rev. Wicha, describing

⁹⁴ Pastor Chalor Roberts, interview by Patricia McLean, 3 October 1998, Phayao, tape recording, translated by B. Wiberly.

⁹⁵ Rev. Chamnarn Saengchai, interview by C. R. Hillier, 8 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

his conversion to Christianity, remarked: "I saw the many ways Jesus helped people. It made me begin to think and compare myself. I had been born into this world and should do something that would benefit society."⁹⁶

The evidence suggests that the first-generation Christians interviewed from CCT either did not initially understand what Christians meant by sin or did not perceive sin to play a significant role in their conversion to Christianity. Not one of the first-generation Christians identified himself or herself as a sinner prior to converting to Christianity. Their inability to comprehend the Christian meaning of the term *baab*, and failure to be impressed by the significance of the Christian doctrine of sin, suggests that at conversion these interviewees were working with a Buddhist understanding of *baab*. This interpretation of the data is supported by the fact that Rev. Dr. Chuleepran related her initial understanding of the Christian concept of *baab* to the Buddhist concept of *kamma*. She recalled:

I was not rich. All those around me thought that I was poor because of the law of *kamma*, because of my previous life that had made me poor. They did not have any hope for the future. They did not think they could change their life. But I came to see that Christianity did not teach that... Dr. Chinda taught in the Sunday school that our God gives us a chance. He taught that God didn't remember our past sins but is the God of the present. At Sunday school they also taught us that God redeemed us from all our sins, and that God redeemed us from the law of *kamma*.⁹⁷

It is relevant to note that none of these five first-generation Christians interviewed from CCT were suffering with leprosy or other serious illness at the time of their conversion to Christianity.

The second and third-generation Christians interviewed understood the basics of Christianity including the Christian teaching about sin from a young age. This is illustrated in the testimony of Rev. Prasaat: "I was raised in a Christian circle since I

⁹⁶ Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁷ Rev. Dr. Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons, interview by C. R. Hillier. Compare the different understandings of sin being articulated by first-generation ACTC Christians who had suffered with leprosy or other serious illness at the time of their conversion to Christianity, Chapter Eight: 2. D. 4., "Sin."

was a child. I already knew the story of Jesus who died for us to redeem us from sin.”⁹⁸ However, two of the interviewees explicitly stated that their understanding of Christianity as a child was fundamentally limited. Rev. Somchit confessed:

When I was a child I understood only a little about my belief and how I should behave. It was almost as if I was blind and walking in the dark... Before I did not know what being a Christian was all about. It seemed all one had to do was to go to church. It seemed meaningless. After I had studied Christianity I realised it had nothing to do with going to church.⁹⁹

A deepening appreciation of Christianity, gained in adulthood, persuaded some of the interviewees to reevaluate the understanding of sin they had received as children. This involved a critique of both the missionary articulation of the doctrine of sin and their Christian ancestors’ perception of *baab*. Rev. Somchit criticised the missionary’s portrayal of the Christian doctrine of sin:

The missionaries seemed to imply that everything and anything that was not taught their way was essentially evil. They looked at Thai culture as if it was satanic and the only method that was correct was the method that the missionaries taught. This produced a form of dictatorship, the result of which was that Thai people were brainwashed. The missionaries believed that the Thai people were sons and daughters of the devil and saw everything in terms of sin and idolatry. This picture is opposite to what we think. This shows the way the missionaries think only in terms of sin, and this idea has been buried in Thai hearts and minds ever since. Thai people are confused about this, for instance drinking whisky or smoking are seen as sin. Going to the pictures or the theatre is seen as sin. All this is seen as sin. This negative type of teaching has caused so much confusion in the hearts and minds of Thai people.¹⁰⁰

Rev. Somchit is not alone in his critique of the missionaries teaching on sin, and related understanding of Thai Buddhist culture. Rev. Dr. Chuleepran also reflected on this in her interview:

When I was studying at the seminary, there were many missionaries who came to teach, but they taught me to look at the whole world from a pessimistic perspective. For example, if I go to see a movie it is sin, entertainment is sin, having a boyfriend is sin. Everything is sin. If a boyfriend and girlfriend walk

⁹⁸ Rev. Prasaat Pansuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁹ Rev. Somchit Huanaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

together, others may stumble. In the end we are not able to be ourselves because we are so fearful that everything is a sin, and we begin to judge others.¹⁰¹

Two interviewees (8 percent) criticised their parents', and grandparents', portrayal of the Christian doctrine of sin. Recalling how his grandparents taught him about sin, Rev. Mana remarked that they "were too concerned about God judging and punishing all the time. I was afraid of God. I was afraid God would punish me if I told a lie, or stole something."¹⁰² He concluded: "My grandparents had good intentions, but the way they communicated gave us a wrong understanding of God."¹⁰³

Six of the twenty-one second and third-generation Christians interviewed (23 percent of the interviewees) spontaneously spoke about how their understanding of sin and of God had changed during the course of their lives as Christians. Instead of emphasising the judgment of God they have come to value the mercy of God. Rev. Dr. Pradit said that he used to understand sin as something he should not do, like smoking or drinking; but now, when asked why he does not smoke or drink, he explains that it is not because he considers smoking and drinking to be sinful in themselves, "but because my body is the body of Christ and I have to keep it clean to honour God."¹⁰⁴ This reassessment of the doctrine of sin represents a reaction against both the missionaries' articulation of sin and the Thai Christians' perception of that message.

As well as endeavouring to articulate a Christian understanding of sin, distinct from both the missionary and their Christian ancestors' portrayal of the doctrine, the interviewees sought to articulate a Christian understanding of sin distinct from the

¹⁰¹ Rev. Dr. Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons, interview by C. R. Hillier. This confirms Rev. Damrong Up-Ngan's comment that there were a range of theological points of view represented on the faculty at the seminary.

¹⁰² Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

Buddhist understanding of *baab*. Commenting on the difference between the Christian and the Buddhist understanding of *baab*, Pastor Saattraa said: “Those who are not Christians would not understand what the Christians mean by sin. They would probably understand sin as murder, stealing, going against the Buddhist rules. The Buddhist understanding of sin is not very deep.”¹⁰⁵ Pastor Thirapong argued that most Thai Christians do not adequately explain the difference between the Christian and Buddhist understandings of sin when seeking to evangelise Thai Buddhists. He remarked that Christians are still “preaching a canned Gospel. That is, that all people are sinners, you must repent and we will pray for you.”¹⁰⁶ He emphasised that this makes no sense to Thai Buddhists because they do not perceive themselves to be sinners.

Discussing the difficulties of explaining the Christian understanding of sin to Thai Buddhists five of the CCT Christians interviewed (19 percent) spoke about the possibility of relating the Christian concept of sin to the Buddhist concept of fate, *kam* or *weenkam*. Rev. Mana contended that the message of Christianity is that Christians have escaped not from sin, but from *weenkam*.¹⁰⁷ Pastor Suphaphorn agreed: “We have escaped from *kam*. We have no *kam*. We have only the grace of God.”¹⁰⁸

5. Salvation

The CCT interviewees indicated their acceptance of an alternative soteriology by their abandonment of merit-making practices. They rejected the Buddhist belief that they were responsible for their own salvation, and accepted Christ as saviour. In the process of discussing how they understood their faith, and how they would explain their faith to a Thai Buddhist, five of the interviewees (19 percent) spoke about salvation as escape from the negative effect of sin and the cycle of life and death.

¹⁰⁵ Pastor Saattraa Buayen, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁶ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁷ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁸ Pastor Suphaphorn Yarnsarn, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Rev. Mana emphasised: “The good news is that you can escape.”¹⁰⁹ When asked what he understood by escape, Rev. Mana clarified: “It is the message of Jesus Christ who has shown his love for men and women in such a way that we do not have to meet with our fate (*weenkam*).”¹¹⁰ Rev. Phongsak commented that when talking to a Thai Buddhist, he “explains salvation as the release from the cycle of birth and death.”¹¹¹ Similarly Rev. Sanan described forgiveness of sins as escape from *weenkam*:

In your [Buddhist] way of escape you have to follow the eight laws, and many others. I say to them if you are able to do that that is good. But as humans we are not able to do this. I say that as Christians we believe in Jesus Christ and it is through him that we escape. I say that Buddha showed us the path of escape by keeping the eight-fold-path and obeying many laws. But Christians have escaped through Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.¹¹²

Only one interviewee, however, spoke about how Jesus breaks the cycle of *weenkam* and enables humans to escape from it. Rev. Thongchai Suwannaa expressed this in terms of Jesus being the one who “has merit:”

I will make a comparison between Buddhism and Christianity. Using the Bible I will illustrate the difference between Buddhism and Christianity. I will ask a Buddhist interested in Christianity, ‘Why in Buddhism do you have to make merit? What do you do it for?’ They say that they are making merit in order to find someone who has merit and has made merit for them. I tell them, ‘Now you can find someone who has merit...He is in the Bible. Jesus is the one who has merit.’¹¹³

While accepting Jesus’ death and resurrection as the means of salvation from sin, it is noticeable that the interviewees’ theological reflection engages with the nature of an appropriate response to salvation, rather than the means by which salvation is mediated.

¹⁰⁹ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Rev. Phongsak Sinthumat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹² Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹³ Rev. Thongchai Suwannaa, interview by C. R. Hillier, 3 March 1999, Papong, Doi Saket, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by J. Tootill.

6. Doing good

When discussing how God saves, three interviewees (12 percent) argued that Thai Christians in CCT often understand salvation in a similar way to Thai Buddhists. They contended that Thai Christians, as much as Thai Buddhists, believe that they will be saved by doing good, or making merit, rather than by trusting in the goodness of God. Challenging this tendency Pastor Sanay reflected: “Christians need to understand that when we give our offering to the church we don’t give it in order to gain merit. When Buddhists put in their offerings they gain merit.”¹¹⁴

Although three interviewees (12 percent) spontaneously remarked that some Thai Christians understand their salvation to relate to making merit, all the interviewees made it clear that they believed their own salvation was not achieved by making merit but by the grace of God. Eight interviewees (31 percent) reflected on the inadequacy of making merit. According to Pastor Suttichai: “We do not gain merit by doing the will of God, for in the end it all rests with the grace of God.”¹¹⁵ Rev. Phakdee asked: “How can man (*sic*) be saved? Is it by making merit, alms giving, or keeping the commandments? No. For Christians, we have a saviour, it is not doing good that helps us. Jesus came to save us.”¹¹⁶ Many of the interviewees commented on the grace of God during their interviews. Rev. Khunakorn described Christianity as the message of “grace upon grace.”¹¹⁷ Rev. Mana said: “The Gospel I received was the Gospel of grace.”¹¹⁸

However, rather than expounding on how the grace of God saves, the interviewees were more concerned with elucidating how Christians should respond to God’s grace. What emerges from the interviews is a Christian theology of doing good, or *tham bun*, in which Christians do good, not as a means of attaining grace, but

¹¹⁴ Pastor Sanay Wangchareon, interview by C. R. Hillier, 10 March 1999, Saraphi, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by M. Cooke.

¹¹⁵ Pastor Suttichai Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁶ Rev. Phakdee Wattanachankun, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁷ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁸ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

because they have already received it. A critical aspect of this Christian doctrine of *tham bun* is the belief that Christians, who have received the grace of God, are obligated to repay the grace of God. Sixteen of the interviewees (62 percent) spoke about repaying the grace of God. They discussed repaying the grace of God mediated to them in their salvation, as well as repaying the grace of God mediated to them through the church, their parents, and other ancestors. This may relate to former vows they had made with God. It may be that they perceived the divine intervention mediated to them as a form of grace that required repayment.¹¹⁹

Pastor Kratsanai and Rev. Mana both articulated their understanding of repaying the grace of God particularly clearly. Pastor Kratsanai said:

It seemed to me that God had shown a great deal of grace towards me. I thought about this a lot, and decided that I would give my life over to God to serve God...I must answer the grace of God, I should give my life to him and go off to study.¹²⁰

Rev. Mana expressed the same idea in relation to his education:

I was conscious of the grace of God, in that I had received a scholarship that had helped me to finance my secondary education. So I saw that it was my duty to reciprocate or pay back the grace of God...When I came to study I did not fully repay God, I only paid back a little...It is necessary that I should repay the grace and love of God for the rest of my life.¹²¹

Repaying the grace of God did not just involve serving God in full-time ministry. The term is also used to refer to a life style of service to God, whatever one's fulltime occupation. Rev. Khunakorn urges all new Christians to consider how they might repay the grace of God: "I teach them that becoming a Christian means serving God, not just being saved. When you become a Christian you must serve God. You must think about what he wants you to do."¹²² Rev. Thongkham's comments reflect a similar understanding. He remarked that he was teaching his second series in church

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Seven: 2. D. 2., "Obedience."

¹²⁰ Pastor Kratsanai Chaiklaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²¹ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²² Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

on, “When God blesses you how should you respond?”¹²³ Rev. Khunakorn described going to church each Sunday as an occasion to reflect on the grace of God received during the week: “We come every Sunday to consider the grace of God, that He (*sic*) has given us life throughout the past six days, and we come to thank him.”¹²⁴ Rev. Khunakorn distinguished this Christian interpretation of going to church from the Buddhist interpretation of going to the temple:

Christians and Buddhists differ in this [going to a place of worship]. Buddhists go to the temple in order to get to heaven. But Christians are already in heaven and they go to church in order to give thanks to God. Christians make merit to pay back what they have already received. Buddhists make merit in order to receive.¹²⁵

As well as discussing the need to repay the grace of God, received as a gift of salvation, the interviewees also discussed repaying the grace of God mediated to them through the church, their parents, and other ancestors. Pastor Yothin described how he had received the grace of God through his church, which had brought him up to be a responsible member of society. In his interview he explained that his service to God was a means of repaying the grace of God that he had received through the church.¹²⁶ Rev. Dr. Pradit remarked that he needed to repay the grace of God that he had received through the life of his mother, as well as the grace of God that his mother herself had received. He said: “I have this feeling that I should do something in order to repay what God has done for my mother.”¹²⁷ Pastor Manit explained that he had to repay the grace of God mediated to him through his grandparents:

My ancestors were willing to die. At that time Christians were executed for their faith and yet they still persisted in their faith. They were willing to die for their faith. I decided to come here [to study] as it might be a way of repaying the debt, the sacrifices my forefathers made for their faith.¹²⁸

¹²³ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁴ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Pastor Yothin Khampheera, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁷ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹²⁸ Pastor Manit Khamlaphit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

The critical difference that the interviewees saw between the Christian and Buddhist understandings of *tham bun* is that Buddhists *tham bun* in order to receive, while Christians *tham bun* because they have already received. The phrase, 'repay the grace of God', replaces the phrase, 'make merit'. Pastor Picharn summed it up as follows:

Christians give, not because they expect to receive blessings in return, but because they have already received God's blessing. We understand God's grace that He (*sic*) has given to us and so we give back to Him (*sic*). This is different from Buddhists. They give in order to gain merit but we give because God has already blessed us. He (*sic*) has given us so many spiritual blessings. So Christians give because we want to return that part to God with thanks giving.¹²⁹

As well as developing a Christian theology of *tham bun* as a means of repaying the gift of God's grace, the interviewees spoke about *tham bun* as a way of blessing. The two understandings of *tham bun*: doing good in order to pay back what one has received and doing good in order to receive, coexisting within Thai Christian theology. The former, doing good in order to pay back what one has received, appears to reject the Thai Buddhist teaching about merit. The later, doing good in order to receive some form of blessing, appears to conform to the Thai Buddhist teaching about merit.

Pastor Saatraa recalled how he was taught by his grandfather that, "If one really followed God, and served God, then God would bless you and your life would be changed. But you must not live your life as a lukewarm Christian if you want to receive blessings from God."¹³⁰ A similar understanding is reflected in Rev. Sanan's testimony. He recollected how his father's family was very poor, "But as he [his father] prayed and gave his life to God's service, the fortunes of his family began to change."¹³¹ He concluded: "Our relatives can see that God has blessed our family."¹³²

¹²⁹ Pastor Picharn Chaithi, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁰ Pastor Saatraa Buayen, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³¹ Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³² Ibid.

It is evident from the interviews that the interviewees are developing a Christian understanding of *tham bun* that includes a belief that God rewards those who do-good. This is a Christian reinterpretation of the law of *kamma*. Rev. Dr. Pradit explained: “Yes, it is true, if you do the right thing the result should be good, if you do the wrong thing the result will be bad. That is very reasonable. *Kam* should be interpreted in that way.”¹³³ He saw this as the “wisdom given from God”, which “helps you to think before you do things.”¹³⁴ However, all the interviews rejected the suggestion that doing-good, or making merit, may mediate salvation or has any effect on the post-death state of an individual. The good that results from doing-good consists of material and spiritual blessings in this life. Eternal salvation is only mediated through the grace of God.

7. The Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Religious Culture

The interviewees were encouraged to express their understanding of the relationship between the presence and purposes of God and the history of Thailand and Thai Buddhist culture. Twenty of the interviewees from CCT (77 percent) revealed that they believed God was present in Thailand prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries. Six (23 percent) were reluctant to affirm this, but were also unwilling to say that God was not present. None of the interviewees stated categorically that God was not present in Thailand before the arrival of Christian missionaries.

In discussing the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture the interviewees expounded on their understanding of the nature of God in order to justify and explain their belief that God was present. They spoke about God as creator, as the God of history, the God who reigns and the God of revelation. Three interviewees (12 percent) talked about God as the creator. They argued that as the creator of the world God was present in the world, and that as the creator of men and women God was present among human communities and in the lives of human persons. For example, Pastor Sanay stated quite categorically: “I believe that God created men and women

¹³³ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

and that God's spirit is in everyone."¹³⁵ Two interviewees (8 percent) talked about God as the God of history. They contended that as the God of history God was active in the history of the world, including the history of Thailand, both before and after the arrival of Christian missionaries. Rev. Prasaat affirmed: "I do not think that God is far away, God is the God of history and has His (*sic*) own way of making Himself (*sic*) known."¹³⁶ One interviewee talked about God as the God who reigns. Pastor Picharn argued that as the God who reigns, God is reigning in the world, including Thailand: "If God didn't rule, then this would be the exception to what God does. I say that this is not possible. God will not leave Thailand. God will not abandon Thailand. God will not forsake Thailand."¹³⁷ Six interviewees (23 percent) talked about God as the God of revelation in the sense that God is inherently self-revealing and has been revealing Godself to the world and to Thailand since the beginning of time. Thus Rev. Khunakorn stated:

I believe that before Christianity came to Thailand God was revealing Himself (*sic*) in Thailand in many different ways. Maybe I am wrong. I don't have much wisdom. But by faith I believe that God revealed Himself (*sic*) to North Thailand, through the spirits. The Jews call God Jehovah. The Thai call God the Spirit, or the Great Spirit.¹³⁸

The interviewees were asked how they understood the relationship between God's presence in Thailand and Thai Buddhism. Significantly, twelve (46 percent) responded by arguing that God's presence in Thailand during this period could be identified with Thai Buddhism. Only eight (31 percent) argued that God's presence could not be identified with Thai Buddhism.

Of the twelve interviewees (46 percent) who argued that God's presence in Thailand could be identified with Buddhism, four (15 percent) did so by contending that all good things come from God, and that whatever is good in Buddhism should also be understood as having come from God. Thus Rev. Wicha argued: "The Bible teaches

¹³⁵ Pastor Sanay Wangcharern, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁶ Rev. Prasaat Pansuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁷ Pastor Picharn Chaithi, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁸ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

us that everything comes from God. There is nothing that God does not allow to happen. The good teachings of the other religions, whether Buddhism or Islam, come from God.”¹³⁹ Rev. Chamnarn agreed:

If it is a religion that causes people to do good, do you think it comes from God? If you say that God created everything I think you must say that this [good religion] comes from God too. I think that the ‘good’ that Buddha spoke of and the ‘good’ that God speaks of is the same ‘good.’¹⁴⁰

Rev. Phongsak reflected:

I don’t want to think that Buddha’s teachings are from the evil spirits or from Satan because Buddha never taught people to do wrong. He taught people to do good, to make merit, to do acts of charity, to do everything that is helpful and have nothing to do with money, wealth, and the praise of men and women. He did not teach that people should kill each other or kill animals, which is the teaching of Satan, isn’t it? Do evil spirits tell people to do good? Oh no!¹⁴¹

The interviewees expounded not only on the general presence of God in Buddhism, mediating ‘good’, but also the specific presence of God in Buddhism revealing Christ. They argued that Buddhism prepared for Christ, and pointed forward to Christ. Nine of the interviewees (35 percent) made the connection between Christ and the Buddhist prophecy about *Phra See An*.¹⁴² Pastor Saattraa referred specifically to the Buddhist expectation that one would come after Buddha, called the *Phra See An*, and identified Jesus as the *Phra See An*: “Real Buddhism, in the teaching of the Buddha, in his teaching about *Phra See An* points to Jesus.”¹⁴³ When asked for clarification he said:

The one who would come to deliver the world from trouble and suffering would have scars on his hands and feet and on his head there would be scars of thorns. He would be the one who would save the world and the Buddha said to follow him.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴⁰ Rev. Chamnarn Saengchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴¹ Rev. Phongsak Sinthumat, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴² For details about *Phra See An* see Chapter Six: 7. “The Acculturation of Christianity in Thai Buddhism.”

¹⁴³ Pastor Saattraa Buayen, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Pastor Saattraa concluded: "The Buddha pointed to Jesus the saviour of the world."¹⁴⁵ Of all the interviewees he came closest to seeing Buddhism as being fulfilled in Christ. His reference to 'real Buddhism' suggests that he is distinguishing between popular Thai Buddhism, understood as an amalgamation of different religious traditions, and classical Buddhism, considered to be pure, or true. It may be conjectured that he is contending that God's presence and purpose could be discerned within true Buddhism, but that those were obscured, even lost, in popular Thai Buddhism. This interpretation of the data is supported by his contention that:

They [Thai Buddhists] say they follow Buddhism but truly it is not Buddhism because they worship spirits and that is a part of Brahmanism. Becoming a monk also involves Brahmin practices. If they [Thai Buddhists] really studied the Buddhist scriptures they would know that Buddha pointed towards Jesus the saviour of the world.¹⁴⁶

Pastor Suphaphorn made a similar distinction when she elucidated how Buddhists meet with God within Buddhism. She argued that not all Thai Buddhists apply themselves to Buddhism but that when a true follower of Buddhism touches the *thamma* of Buddhism they touch God, and that when they reach *nippan*, they are born again:

When our Buddhist friends have problems it is because they do not enter into or reach the *thamma* [reach the heart or the spirit of the matter]. They are just stuck with the form of religion not the reality. I have one belief that God is the One and Only God in the world, but mankind (*sic*) takes the characteristics of God and puts a name to them, in fact exceedingly many names. Those who are true Buddhists enter into the true *thamma*, thus they reach God. I believe this. But they must really get to the *thamma*. They must not be taken up with Buddha images, but reach *nippan*. The point of the state of *nippan* is that of being born anew.¹⁴⁷

The translation of the term *thamma* is complex. The Sanskrit term, *dharma*, and Pali term, *dhamma*, have a number of different meanings, the most common being the Buddha's teaching. Here Pastor Suphaphorn uses the equivalent Thai term, *thamma*, to distinguish between the heart, or spirit, of a religion and the outer trappings of a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Pastor Suphaphorn Yamsarn, interview by C. R. Hillier..

religion. It may be that she understands Buddhists to reach the heart, or spirit, of Buddhism within the Buddhist teaching, but that is not made clear.

Understanding that *nippan* means the extinguishing and disappearing of self, the interviewer asked Pastor Suphaphorn for clarification of what she meant: “Yes, that is right, there is no more the state of being one’s self, when it happens [when they reach *nippan*] there is the cross.”¹⁴⁸ Pastor Suphaphorn’s reflections entail a radical Christian re-interpretation of Buddhist teaching. The Buddhist *thamma* is interpreted as God. The Buddhist ideal of attaining *nippan* is described as being born again, and as meeting the cross of Christ. Christian concepts and Christian symbols are projected on to the central tenets of Buddhism. Pastor Suphaphorn’s exposition entails not only an affirmation of the presence of God in Thai Buddhism prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries in Thailand, but also a belief that Buddhists in Thailand during that period were meeting with God within Buddhism, providing they applied themselves wholeheartedly to the true teaching of the Buddha.

8. Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?

Twenty-one of the Christians interviewed from CCT (81 percent) argued that there was a significant possibility that Buddhists could be saved within Buddhism.¹⁴⁹ The interviewees’ responses are consistent with their understanding of God’s presence in Thailand prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries. The majority of interviewees having contended that God was present in Thailand, outwith the Christian missionary presence, and had been revealing himself to Thai Buddhists within Thai Buddhism. The interviewees’ comments reveal their belief that the presence of God, and revelation of God, in Thailand, outwith established Christianity, had been adequate for salvation.

In discussing these issues five interviewees (19 percent) made a comparison between the people of Israel who lived before Christ and the Thai who lived before the arrival

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Three (eleven percent) of the interviewees’ comments were unclear and are not therefore included in these statistics.

of Christian missionaries. They argued that God is able to save the Thai in the same way as God saved the faithful of Israel. According to Rev. Wicha:

I would say that this is like the Jewish people, in the time of the old covenant, before Jesus came. I would say that God provided a way of salvation for the Jews and also for the Thai...I believe God must have a way because truly these people [Jews and Buddhists] are the people God has made in His (*sic*) image.¹⁵⁰

Rev. Thiraphong made a more specific comparison between the role of sacrifice in the Old Testament and in Thai Buddhist culture. He argued that both forms of sacrifice are a way of approaching God: "The Lord might use the way he spoke to Abraham and Isaac in the Old Testament, through sacrifice. Those looking on might think that the person offering the sacrifice [in Thailand] is offering the sacrifice to a spirit, but they are really seeking God."¹⁵¹

When Pastor Suttichai was asked about whether or not Buddhists could be saved he immediately responded by addressing the Buddhist belief that the circumstances into which one is born are dependent on an individual's *weenkam*. He asked:

Was it their sin that they were born then [before the arrival of Christian missionaries]? Was it their sin that they were born before Jesus was born? We can't say that it was a mistake on God's part. I think that God is a God of love and mercy. God had a definite purpose for them.¹⁵²

Rev. Somchit responded to the question about the salvation of Thai Buddhists by referring to the passage in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks about calling sheep of other flocks (John 10:17). He commented: "Jesus said, 'There are other sheep, which are not of this fold, I must also gather them in'"¹⁵³ and went on to explain that the 'other sheep' spoken of by Jesus include the Buddhists in Thailand.

¹⁵⁰ Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵¹ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵² Pastor Suttichai Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵³ Rev. Somchit Huanaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

When discussing these issues the interviewees argued that God saves those who seek God and who have faith in God. Three interviewees contended that when Thai Buddhists participate in Buddhist, or spirit worship, they are seeking God and that, as they seek God, God will respond. Thus Pastor Thiraphong affirmed:

I think that those who worship nature such as the sky, water, termite houses, and the earth, deep in their hearts, are seeking God... They understand that all things come from a creator God, and are trying to communicate with God. Maybe they think that the lightening is God, or the sun is God, but the point is that they are seeking the creator God.¹⁵⁴

Similarly Rev. Mana stated: "Those who seek God, even if they do not hear the message of God, but seek God, God will take responsibility for them."¹⁵⁵ The context of Rev. Mana's comment indicates that 'take responsibility for them' involves taking responsibility for the spirit of the individual after death. However, each of the interviewees who argued that Thai Buddhists who seek God will be found and 'saved' by God, continued to affirm that it is the grace of God that saves, and not the act of seeking. Rev. Thiraphong concluded his reflection, noted above: "I believe that there is a possibility of salvation because of the grace of God."¹⁵⁶

Four other interviewees (15 percent) placed their emphasis on salvation lying in the human response to God's self-revelation, rather than their search for God. They argued that those who respond to what they know of God, will meet with God. They also argued that it is the grace of God that saves and not the act of responding to the revelation of God. They explained that the grace of God is mediated to those who respond to the revelation of God. Rev. Khunakorn contended that Buddhists who lived without knowing Christ will be saved "by faith in the God that they worship, whom they call God."¹⁵⁷ He compared the Buddhists who have faith in the God they know, with the Jews who have faith in Jehovah, and argued that if both Thai

¹⁵⁴ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵⁵ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵⁶ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁵⁷ Rev. Khunakorn Khunasawad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Buddhists and Israelites have faith in, God or Jehovah, “it will lead them to salvation.”¹⁵⁸

Although many of the interviewees had commented earlier in the interviews on the positive effect of doing good, or making merit, they all contended that ultimately salvation depends upon the grace and mercy of God and not on any good that men or women might do. Rev. Sanan’s comment is typical of this view:

They [Buddhists] will be judged by their deeds and God will judge them in justice...They are saved by their deeds, because the way of God has not yet been revealed to them. They do not know the way of God. But their salvation does not depend on their deeds but on the grace of God.¹⁵⁹

A belief in the grace and mercy of God is central to the interviewees’ argument that God saves. In the words of Pastor Thirapong: “There is hope because of the grace of God;”¹⁶⁰ and of Pastor Manit; “That God does not abandon or throw away” because of “the mercy of God.”¹⁶¹ Rev. Wicha elucidated his understanding of the grace of God by speaking about the Thai tradition of the King pardoning convicted criminals each year:

Truly the grace of God and the love of God come together. For example in Thailand...every year, on 5th December, the King pardons prisoners all over the country....The King does not think he [the prisoner] is a good person, but that he is one of his subjects who lives in Thailand and should have the opportunity to return to his family....The prisoner is released from prison by the love of the King. This can be compared to grace. Grace freely given without condition.¹⁶²

Twenty-one interviewees (81 percent) were strongly opposed to the contention that there is no salvation for those without a knowledge of Christ. They affirmed that God is the one who administers saving grace and God is the one who decides who is, and who is not, saved. Only two interviewees (8 percent) categorically denied this: Rev.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Rev. Sanan Wuti, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁶⁰ Pastor Thiraphong Chaisri, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁶¹ Pastor Manit Khamlaphit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁶² Rev. Wicha Nathikhunnatham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Chamnarn simply rejected the possibility of their salvation. Rev. Thongkham argued that the relationship between Buddhism and evil spirits meant that Buddhists were under the power of evil spirits, and not accessible to the power of God. He insisted:

These people don't see anything at all. They believe and have faith in the teachings of Buddha. They must be in the power of Satan and evil spirits. If the word of God does not come to them they will spend their lives in that darkness continually.¹⁶³

3. Summary of the Research Data

Twenty-one of the CCT interviewees (81 percent) were registered as Christians at birth. They became familiar with the principal doctrines of the Christian faith as children, but had little or no comparable knowledge or experience of the Buddhist faith. As members of a Christian minority they were instructed how to conduct themselves in an overwhelmingly Buddhist society. For the most part they were forbidden to participate in Buddhist religious culture. Five of the CCT interviewees (19 percent) were Buddhist by birth, and converted to Christianity as children and young adults. Their exposure to Buddhism was also limited. None of them had been ordained into the Buddhist priesthood. All the interviewees had studied at the Theological Faculty of Payap University where they were challenged to think through their understanding of their Christian heritage, in particular, their understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism. The evidence suggests that the interviewees responded to this challenge in a number of different ways.

When discussing aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in which it may be legitimate for Thai Christians to participate in all the interviewees drew a distinction between culture and religion. Having made this distinction as a matter of consensus, they had little consensus as to which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture were either legitimate or illegitimate for Christian participation. Instead, they evidence a great deal of uncertainty and confusion over these issues. Aware of the negative consequences of the Christian community's withdrawal from Thai Buddhist culture and keen to

¹⁶³ Rev. Thongkham Kanthawee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

promote better relationships with their Buddhist neighbours, at least thirteen interviewees (50 percent) were willing to condone participation in strictly religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture by radically re-interpreting them within the Christian context. Eight interviewees (31 percent), however, did not accept that such re-interpretation was a viable option.

The positive attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture, expressed by some interviewees, enabled them to explore how Buddhism might contribute to Christianity. In particular the interviewees were eager to explore how Thai culture and Thai religion might be incorporated into Thai Christian worship. All the interviewees were willing to embrace what they defined as cultural aspects of Thai culture, such as Thai music and dance, and incorporate them into Christian worship. Fifteen interviewees (58 percent) were willing to incorporate both cultural and religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture, including the Buddhist practice of meditation and going in procession to the temple, and Buddhist wedding rituals. They believed that Buddhist religious culture should be re-interpreted within the Christian context in order to render Thai Christianity less foreign and more Thai. Nine interviewees (35 percent) were unwilling to incorporate what they deemed as religious aspects of Thai culture. At least six of these interviewees (23 percent) feared that incorporating Buddhist religious culture into Christianity would undermine the distinctive identity of the Christian community in Thailand. The existence of both traditional and innovative opinions indicates that as a Christian community CCT Christians are still in the process of re-evaluating their Christian heritage. Their minority status as Christians in a predominately Buddhist country, as well as the rapid cultural change that is occurring in Thailand, exacerbates the struggle for a Christian identity.

It is significant that these CCT interviewees, with limited understanding of and exposure to Buddhism, reveal the influence of their Buddhist heritage in their articulation of their Christian beliefs. God is described as spirit and interpreted within the context of the Thai Buddhist spirit world. Rather than understanding God, *phracaw*, to be a Christian innovation in Thai cosmology, the interviewees identified

phracaw with the spirit(s) that Buddhists identify as ‘all the sacred things in the universe’ or ‘the one who is all-powerful and over all the earth.’ In this way the interviewees recognised *phracaw* within their Buddhist heritage. Interestingly, Thai Buddhist beliefs about spiritual patronage continued to influence even these second and third-generation Christians’ manner of relating to *phracaw*. At least eight interviewees (31 percent) made a vow to God, whereby they appealed to *phracaw* for help and promised loyalty and service in return. The Thai Buddhist spirit world is re-interpreted in relation to *phracaw*. God is believed to be the all-powerful spirit and the other spirits are believed to be evil spirits in league with Satan. The inconsistencies in the Christian understanding of, and interaction with, the spirits of Thai Buddhism disclosed in the interviews indicates the ongoing tensions Thai Christians are experiencing as they endeavour to interpret the spirits of Thai Buddhism within Thai Christianity.

The interviewees have begun to dialogue with the Christian doctrine of sin which they received from missionaries, Christian ancestors and the church. They are eager to distance themselves from aspects of the missionary teaching about sin as well as the way in which the missionary teaching about sin has been understood and articulated by Thai Christians. They disliked the way in which sin had been defined by what one could not do and by what would invoke the wrath of God. They were particularly critical of the view that Thai culture and religion were inherently sinful. However, while the interviewees were able to identify aspects of the received Christian doctrine of sin which they wished to reject, they were less able to articulate an alternative Christian doctrine of sin that is intelligible to Buddhist neighbours. Only one interviewee, Rev. Dr. Pradit offered an alternative understanding of sin, developing a Christian understanding of the sanctity of the body by which to resist the habits of smoking and drinking. While recognising that the Christian understanding of *baab* is different from the Buddhist understanding, only five interviewees (19 percent) discussed how the Christian understanding of *baab* may be related to the Buddhist concept of *baab* or *weenkam*. Their limited engagement with the Buddhist doctrine of sin may well reflect their unfamiliarity with Buddhism and lack of confidence in discussing Buddhist concepts and terminology. The

interviewees' failure to dialogue in more depth with the Buddhist doctrine of *baab* does not infer that their current understanding of sin as Christians has been unaffected by Buddhism. Rather, the frequent references to sin as wrongful actions, such as smoking, drinking or gambling, may reflect the influence of the Buddhist understanding of *baab* which recognises sin as wrongful actions. This interpretation of sin as wrongful action may be the outcome of their Christian ancestors' earlier inculturation of Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context that has been unconsciously accepted by many of the second and third-generation Christians interviewed.

In a similar way the interviewees did not dialogue in depth with Buddhism when discussing the salvific significance and function of Christ. While accepting the Christian belief that salvation is dependent on the saviour Jesus Christ, only five interviewees (19 percent) spoke about salvation as escape from *weenkam*. Only one interviewee, Rev. Thongchai, expanded how Jesus is understood to break the cycle of *weenkam*, identifying Jesus as the one who has merit. The interviewees did, however, engage in some depth with the Buddhist understanding of merit. The emerging Christian theology of *tham bun* reflects their belief that Christians do good, not to ensure their own salvation, but because they have already received the grace and mercy of God. The grace and mercy of God is understood to have been mediated to them through the church, their Christian ancestors, and in their own salvation. They insist it is their Christian duty to *tham bun* in response to the grace received. The interviewees also develop the understanding of *tham bun* as a way of blessing. Rev. Dr. Pradit giving the law of *kamma* a Christian reinterpretation, arguing that Christians, like Buddhists, receive good, or are blessed, in accordance with their good deeds and that this interpretation of the law of *kamma* is consistent with Christian teaching.

Responding to increasingly specific questions about the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism twenty interviewees (77 percent) insisted that God was present in Thai Buddhist culture. No one interviewee stated categorically that God was not present. The interviewees expanded on the character of God in order to articulate their belief that God was present and active within Thai Buddhist culture.

They spoke about God as the creator, the God of history, the God who reigns, and the God of revelation. Seven interviewees (27 percent) who had already identified God with 'all the sacred things in the universe,' affirmed that in their Christian understanding God was present in Thai Buddhist culture. Significantly, twelve interviewees (46 percent) argued that God's presence in Thai Buddhist culture could be identified with Buddhism. They contended that God's presence may be identified with all that is beneficial and good in Thai Buddhism. They argued, in particular, that God's presence may reveal Christ within Buddhism, in fulfilment of the Buddhist expectation of a future Buddha. Two interviewees (4 percent) distinguished between popular Thai Buddhism and 'true' or 'real' Buddhism when discussing the presence and purposes of God in Thai religious culture. They contended that God may be identified with true Buddhism but not necessarily with what they regarded as the distorted form that Buddhism has taken in Thailand. Only eight interviewees (31 percent) were unable to perceive any relationship between God's presence and Thai Buddhism.

In accordance with the interviewees' contention that the presence and purposes of God may be identified in Thai Buddhist culture, twenty-one of the interviewees (81 percent) argued that Buddhists may be saved without an explicit knowledge of Christ. Only two interviewees (8 percent) insisted that salvation was impossible in these terms. Those who contended that an explicit knowledge of Christ is not necessary for salvation saw a precedent in the people of Israel who lived before Christ and who were saved within their own religious tradition. None of the interviewees expand on whether all the people of Israel are saved, or only the 'faithful remnant.' Five interviewees (19 percent) compared Thai Buddhists, who lived before the arrival of Christian missionaries, to Israelites who lived before the advent of Christ. One interviewee (4 percent) insisted that the New Testament also reveals the possibility of an alternative means of salvation, referring to Jesus' words about calling sheep of other flocks. The interviewees believed that as Thai Buddhists seek God and respond to God's self-revelation within their own religious tradition the salvific grace of God may be mediated to them. All the interviewees insisted that it is only the grace of God that saves.

The interviewees' reflections indicate the presence of an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity within CCT. They openly discuss the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity and the implications of their different understandings for inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context. They have begun to explore how implicit faith in God may be expressed within the Thai Buddhist context and relates to Buddhism. That is, how Thai Buddhists, without an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ or the Gospel, express their faith in God. There are, however, no indications in the interviews that the interviewees have begun to compare, or discuss the relative merits/demerits, of an explicit and implicit faith in God. That is, they have not begun to explore the relationship between implicit faith in God, as a Buddhist, and explicit faith in God, as a Christian.

Chapter Eight: The Associated Churches in Thailand - Central: Inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist Context

1. Introduction

Thirty Thai Christians were selected from ACTC for interview. Ten of the Thai Christians interviewed from ACTC (33 percent) had received a theological education before OMF established residential theological colleges. Six of these ten interviewees received their theological education within the local church from OMF missionaries, either through a series of Short Term Bible Schools extending over a period of about six weeks, or through the Home Bible Study program that was set up by OMF to train Thai church leaders. The other four interviewees had attended Maranatha Bible College in Khonkeang, Northeast Thailand, which was established by the Christian & Missionary Alliance (CMA) for the theological education of Thai Christians with leprosy. They had all taken on leadership roles within the church as preachers, teachers and evangelists before OMF inaugurated the role of full-time church pastor. Only two of these interviewees - Pastor Boonma Wayhuay and Pastor Boonmee Meelon, both graduates from Maranatha Bible College – had been inducted as full-time church pastors alongside the younger graduates from the established OMF theological colleges. At the time of interview Pastor Boonma was working as an evangelist at Manorom Christian Hospital. Pastor Boonmee, who had been a pivotal figure within ACTC serving as Chairman of the ACTC Central Committee for many years, was working as an area pastor in Uthai province. The other eight, who had received their theological education either within the local church or at Maranatha Bible College, but had not been inducted as full-time church pastors were: Toob Maasatit, Teng Prasert, Suphot Sriprasad, Riab Sukkasem, Sanun Muangchui, Songkhram Chanphaak, Yaud Phummun and Samphan Direksuk.

Seven of these Thai Christians (23 percent of all Thai Christians interviewed from ACTC) had suffered with leprosy prior to their conversion to Christianity: Pastor Boonma, Pastor Boonmee, Toob, Teng, Suphot, Riab and Sanun. Toob was the first

person willing to receive treatment for leprosy from OMF missionaries in Central Thailand. He converted to Christianity in the 1950s and has been a key figure in both the 'Leprosy Believers' Church,' and later ACTC. Teng was selected to attend the vocational training centre for leprosy patients at Manorum Christian Hospital. He became adept as a shoe-maker despite being severely deformed by leprosy, and later worked on staff at the vocational training centre. Suphot served as an elder in Manorum Church, ran the printing press at Manorum Christian Hospital, and was responsible for the old people's home established in Manorum for elderly people with leprosy whose families are unwilling or unable to care for them. Sanun was also employed by the printing press at Manorum Christian Hospital. Riab had composed many Thai Christian worship songs set to traditional Thai tunes since his conversion to Christianity over thirty years ago. At the time of interview he was collating and publishing them with the help of an assistant. He is greatly deformed by leprosy and lives in the old people's home in Manorum, which Suphot supervises.

Only three of the ten Thai Christians who received a theological education outwith the residential Bible colleges established by OMF, had been completely free of leprosy: Songkhram, Yaud and Samphan. Songkhram served as a lay leader in the ACTC church in Nongcham, Uthai province. Yaud and Samphan lived and worked at Manorum Christian Hospital, serving in the ACTC church in Manorum. In addition to the seven interviewees who suffered with leprosy prior to their conversion to Christianity, Pastor Prasit Yaakham, who attended Phayao Bible College, had been seriously ill with tuberculosis before his conversion, and Pastor Prawit Somchai, who had also been educated at Phayao Bible College, had been seriously ill with hepatitis prior to his conversion.

Nineteen of the Thai Christians interviewed from ACTC (63 percent) received a theological education at Bible colleges established by OMF, either Phayao Bible College in North Thailand, or Bangkok Bible College, in Bangkok. Thirteen of these graduates (43 percent) were working as full-time church pastors in ACTC at the time of interview. Two, Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong and Pastor Winitchai Chaimawong, were working as Hospital Chaplains/Evangelists at Manorum

Christian Hospital. Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn was manager of the Christian bookshop in Nakhon Sawan. Pastor Thawat Yenchai was pastoring an indigenous Thai church in Chiangmai. Pastor Chalor Roberts had married a North American OMF missionary and was working as a missionary in North Thailand with OMF. Pastor Arphon Chaleerin was semi-retired and living in Bangkok. He was selected for interview because of the critical role he has played in ACTC. One interviewee, Pastor Somchai Phromthaisong, was educated at a Pentecostal Bible School attached to the Jaisaman Church in Bangkok before being inducted as a pastor in ACTC. In total, fifteen of the interviewees (50 percent) were working as full-time church pastors in ACTC at the time of interview: thirteen were graduates of Phayao or Bangkok Bible College, one of Maranatha Bible College and one of the Pentecostal Bible School in Bangkok.

Twenty-three of the Thai Christians interviewed from the ACTC (77 percent) were first-generation Christians who converted from Buddhism to Christianity as adults. Only seven of the Thai Christians interviewed (23 percent) were second or third-generation Christians. Six of the second or third-generation Christians (20 percent) were from North Thailand and originally members of CCT. They decided to attend OMF Bible colleges rather than the CCT seminary in Chiangmai, and then to work as pastors within the ACTC. These included Pastor Prawit, Pastor Mana Suanboon, Pastor Notsit Kamnerdnathee, Pastor Supon Yoodee, Pastor Winitchai Chaimawong and Rev. Suttiophorn Somchai. Only one of the second-generation Christians was originally from Central Thailand and a member of ACTC from childhood. The lack of second and third-generation Christians in ACTC is a reflection of the length of time ACTC has been established.

Three interviewees (10 percent) were female: Pastor Chalor works as a missionary in North Thailand; Pastor Ratchanee is a Hospital Chaplain at Manorom Christian Hospital; and Pastor Pramuaphorn Sonserm is a church pastor in Lopburi. Two of the interviewees were under thirty years old. Ten were between thirty and forty years old. Six were between forty and fifty years old. Eight between fifty and sixty years old, and four were over sixty years old.

The chapter will begin by exploring issues of the theological self-identity of these ACTC Christians. This will include an analysis of the interviewees' conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, their understanding of Thai religion and Thai culture, their rejection of Buddhism as a religious system and their articulation of their Christian beliefs. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the data.

2. Issues of the theological self-identity of ACTC Christians

A. Conversion from Buddhism to Christianity

In Central Thailand it is accepted that to be Thai is to be Buddhist. This is reflected in the interviews. Songkhram remarked: "We were Buddhists. For the Thai, if our parents are Buddhist then we are Buddhist. As soon as children are born, before they know anything, they are registered as Buddhists."¹ Twenty-three of the Christians interviewed from ACTC (77 percent) considered themselves to have been Buddhist from birth, and had been actively involved in the Buddhist community until their conversion to Christianity as adults. Five of the interviewees (17 percent) received their basic education in the Buddhist temple from Buddhist monks. Pastor Arphon recalled: "During the time of my childhood the only place to study books was at the local temple, by becoming a monk's attendant."² Eleven of the interviewees (37 percent) were ordained as Buddhist monks. Pastor Boonmee recalled: "I was ordained as a Buddhist monk because it was part of our tradition. It was a way of showing that you were completely a man and people would then respect you as such."³ Sanun commented: "My parents asked me to be ordained and so I obeyed. I did not think twice about it. I was a Buddhist."

¹ Songkhram Chanphaak, interview by C. R. Hillier, 17 November 1998, Nongchang, Uthai, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

² Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, interview by C. R. Hillier, 18 November 1998, Manorom, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

³ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier, 31 October 1998, Uthai, tape recording, translated by Busakorn Anasuwat.

As Thai Buddhists the interviewees recalled that they had been disinterested in, even hostile towards, Christianity. Twenty-one of the interviewees (70 percent) remarked that they were not initially attracted to Christianity. Pastor Prasit said that he had not been interested in Christianity. Commenting on his early exposure to evangelistic Christian literature he said: "I took the tracts to read superficially, but I wasn't really interested and only noticed the cover and the pictures."⁴ Others recalled their strongly negative reaction to Christianity. Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn's comment is typical of these. He remarked: "I was a very devout Buddhist and wasn't willing to listen to the Christian message. I thought it was the foreigner's religion."⁵ Sanun's response reveals a particularly Thai manner of dealing with this hostility: "At that time I resisted strongly. He [missionary] asked to pray for me. I despised him and refused to hold my hands together in a gesture of prayer, I secretly put my feet together instead."⁶

Increasingly interest replaced the disinterest and antagonism towards Christianity. Toob recalled the way the medical care he received from OMF missionaries as a leprosy patient began to soften both his, and his mother's, initially negative response to Christianity. He remarked:

My mother was very firm in her faith and strongly objected to my interest in Christianity. But the missionaries carried on coming to our house because I had leprosy. My mother saw the foreigners come back again and again to our house, not just to tell us about Jesus Christ, but to bring medical help. My mother felt indebted to them, and unable to object. After a while I became really interested but wasn't ready to believe. I kept on asking the missionaries questions until I was certain. What really reached my heart was the way the

⁴ Pastor Prasit Yaakham, interview by C. R. Hillier, 18 January 1999, Nakhon Sawan, tape recording, translated by J. Trelogan.

⁵ Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn, interview by C. R. Hillier, 10 December 1998, Nakhon Sawan, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

⁶ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier, 22 January 1999, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by L. Mostert. In Thai culture to bring the palms of the hands together and raise them to the face is both a common greeting and a sign of respect. The feet are considered to be the lowliest of the body parts. To bring the feet together instead of the hands would be understood as a potent insult.

missionaries cared for me even though I was covered in sores and belonged to another nation.⁷

Recollecting the reasons for their conversion from Buddhism to Christianity nineteen of the Thai Christians interviewed from ACTC (63 percent) spoke of a growing disillusionment with Buddhism. The evidence suggests that physical malady, of which leprosy was a widespread example, significantly influenced the interviewees' attitude towards their Buddhist faith. Eight of the nine interviewees who had been seriously unwell prior to their conversion to Christianity (88 percent of the interviewees who were unwell) spontaneously talked about their own disillusionment with Buddhism. By contrast, eleven of the twenty-one interviewees who were well prior to their conversion to Christianity (52 percent of the well interviewees) talked about their disillusionment with Buddhism. Six of the seven interviewees with leprosy specifically identified leprosy as the cause of their disillusionment with Buddhism. Teng's comments are typical of those who were unwell at the time of their conversion: "I realised that Buddhism couldn't change people...Buddha taught people to be merciful to one another, but people were not merciful to me when I had leprosy."⁸ This led him to conclude that, "People just hold the precepts [of Buddhism] superficially and they have no internal impact."⁹ By contrast, Riap recalled his initial impression of the Thai Christian community: "I saw that those who were not diseased and those who had leprosy did not despise one another. Instead they were happy to be in each other's company, and they laughed together. They did not take offence."¹⁰

⁷ Toob Maasatit, interview by C. R. Hillier, 12 November 1998, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

⁸ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean, 6 July 1998, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by M. Prasert.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier, 2 November 1998, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

The Buddhist belief that ill health was a direct result of sin predisposed those who were unwell to a greater sense of their own sinfulness.¹¹ This is evidenced in the reflection of Pastor Boonmee:

I thought I was a sinner. I believed that I was sick with leprosy because of my sin. When I heard the story of Noah from the missionaries, I was terribly afraid. I thought that I would be punished for my sin in the same way as those who drowned in the flood.¹²

This increased sensitivity to sin, and fear of its effects, seem to be an additional reason why those who were unwell were more likely to become disillusioned with Buddhism and increasingly interested in Christianity. While Buddhism appeared to offer those with leprosy little effective relief, either physically or spiritually, Christianity offered both physical and spiritual comfort.

All the interviewees recounted a process of conversion from Buddhism to Christianity. Disinterest was replaced by interest in, and finally acceptance of, Christianity. It is evident, however, that, for at least some of the interviewees, it was not immediately clear that the acceptance of Christianity entailed the rejection of Buddhism. Suphot recalled that his conversion initially did not produce tension within his Buddhist family, “because they thought that Buddhism and Christianity could be combined.”¹³ It was only later that opposition arose, when they realised that in converting to Christianity he was cutting himself off from Buddhism, ceasing to participate in the Buddhist religious life.

Four interviewees (13 percent) described how they continued to practice both Buddhism and Christianity after converting to Christianity. Toob disclosed:

I began to read about the Lord Jesus, about his love and his sacrifice, but I didn't understand because my mother had taught me how to pray to the Buddha. In fact, when I first started to pray, I prayed to both Buddha and Jesus Christ. Sometimes I thought of one and sometimes of the other.¹⁴

¹¹ See Chapter Seven: 2. D. 4., “Sin.”

¹² Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³ Suphot Sriprasaad, interview by C. R. Hillier, 16 January 1999, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

¹⁴ Toob Maasatit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

When asked how long this continued, he replied: "It was a year that I was in conflict."¹⁵ In a similar way Pastor Ratchanee recalled: "Before I used to wear an amulet around my neck. When I believed and went to church I still wore the amulet. Later I understood and took the amulet off."¹⁶ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam described how he continued to feel a sense of personal commitment and loyalty towards Buddhism even after he had started to study theology at Bible College. He said that while at college, "I tried to defend Buddhism. That is why I had problems at Phayao [Phayao Bible College]. I thought it [Buddhism] was still mine."¹⁷

It is evident that all the interviewees, both first-generation converts and those who were raised in Christian homes, eventually concluded that converting to Christianity entailed jettisoning Buddhism. Toob commented: "If we are to go the new way, finish with the old way. Why return to it again? We do not despise the old way but we leave it behind."¹⁸ Pastor Pramuaphorn remarked: "I had to discard the old way...It was as if I had decided to go in a whole new direction. I had to learn the new way. The old way taught one thing, but the Bible taught another."¹⁹ Three of the interviewees (10 percent) explicitly acknowledged the influence that missionaries, and other Thai Christians, had on their decision to reject their Buddhist heritage. Pastor Boonmee said:

I got rid of the old faith. Many people who led me to know God, like Jim, Alex, Dr Juzi, Dr Jeranai, and the nurses, taught me to leave it all. Jim made it clear to me that it was possible for evil to come to us in many different ways, including through other religions. These evil spirits try to kill, steal and destroy our faith, therefore I ran from them.²⁰

Pastor Boonsing Suphan recounted a similar experience:

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier, 18 January 1999, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by J. Trelogan.

¹⁷ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁸ Toob Maasatit, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁹ Pastor Pramuaphorn Sonserm, interview by C. R. Hillier, 26 January 1999, Lopburi, tape recording, translated by L. Mostert.

²⁰ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

At that point I separated myself [from Buddhism] and did not get involved in any of the religious rites and ceremonies, for I was being shepherded by spiritual leaders. I also had spiritual friends who gently helped me with the parts which I still did not understand, saying, one can do this, and one cannot do that.²¹

Although the interviewees' explicit rejection of Buddhism may reflect the influence of missionaries, and other Thai Christians, thirteen interviewees (43 percent) contended that it was the inevitable consequence of understanding Christianity. For example Pastor Boonsing argued: "When Christians know [about their faith], they begin to understand that these things [Buddhist beliefs and practices] no longer ought to be a part of their lives."²² Pastor Samryt Meetoeng contended that the more deeply Christians understand their Christian faith, the more they will appreciate the necessity of leaving Buddhism:

It is difficult for them not to be involved in Buddhism [attending the Buddhist temple and joining in Buddhist religious practices] if they have not been taught and they don't have a real foundation in their Christian faith. You can't blame them for this, the blame is on the church. But if we teach them the principles, and the foundation of their faith, they are able to work it out themselves.²³

B. Religion and Culture

The evidence of the interviews is that the converts' rejection of Buddhism first becomes apparent in their withdrawing from participation in Buddhist religious practices that unite Thai communities and permeate the whole of Thai Buddhist culture. To opt out of Thai religious life is to become marginal to Thai society. The interviewees were aware of this. They endeavoured to address this situation, arguing that Thai Christians can continue to be a vital part of any Thai community by participating in cultural, rather than religious, aspects of Thai Buddhist culture. Underlying many of the interviewees' reflections is the assumption that Thai culture may be distinguished from Thai religion, and that there are positive elements in Thai

²¹ Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier, 7 November 1998, Lansak, Uthai, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

²² Ibid.

²³ Pastor Samryt Meetoeng, interview by C. R. Hillier, 20 February 1999, Nakhon Sawan, tape recording, translated by R. Trelogan.

culture that Thai Christians can be engaged in, without participating in Thai religion. Pastor Boonma contended: "We have to realise that there are good aspects of Thai culture, Thai traditions, that are not Buddhist, but are part of our social structure."²⁴ Pastor Boonsing said:

Regarding the religious ceremonies and rites which are connected with spirit worship and with burnt sacrifices, one ought to flee or escape these. But their relationship with their family would indicate that they ought to attend certain events, whether they are Christians, who have separated themselves from these things and become holy persons, or not.²⁵

Appropriating the distinction between culture and religion appears to have been the common response to the desire to remain faithful to both the Christian tradition they had received and their national identity.

However, there was disagreement amongst the interviewees as to what constitutes religion as distinct from culture. As Stewart and Shaw recognise, the categories religion and culture are constantly in flux, and "one aspect of that 'religion' deemed critical in one period may be deemed 'cultural' and non-essential to religion in another."²⁶ For example, it is apparent from the interviews that there are different opinions about the significance of *wai*-ing the corpse at a Buddhist funeral. Some believe that it is not acceptable for Thai Christians to *wai* the body of the deceased at the funeral because of the religious significance associated with the act. Pastor Mana Noomaa contended that *wai*-ing the body is a form of reverencing the spirit of the dead person and as such is not an acceptable practice for Thai Christians to be involved in.²⁷ Others, however, insisted that Christians may *wai* the body. Pastor Pramaphorn explained that it is acceptable for Thai Christians to *wai* the body

²⁴ Pastor Boonma Wayhuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

²⁵ Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

²⁶ Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 10.

²⁷ Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier, 26 January 1999, Lopburi, tape recording, translated by D Nisbet.

because it does not involve reverencing the spirits: “If we light incense we are reverencing the spirits, if we *wai* the corpse we are honouring the dead person.”²⁸

Twenty-eight of the interviewees (93 percent) were only willing to condone Christian involvement in what are presumed as non-religious, ‘cultural’, activities of any Buddhist occasion, such as preparing food and taking photos. Two interviewees (7 percent), however, were critical of this position believing that it was legitimate for Christians to participate in some Buddhist religious ceremonies and that their refusal to participate was having a detrimental effect on Buddhist-Christian relations in Central Thailand. One of them, Rev. Suttiphorn, contended that one of the problems in ACTC is that Christians expect Buddhists to join the Christian ceremonies but refuse to join the Buddhist ceremonies:

We [Christians] invite them to come and join in with us and they [Buddhists] come to our ceremonies and are involved in everything we do, but when we go to their ceremonies we separate ourselves. In my thinking this is not right. When they go to chant they invite us to join them, but we don’t.²⁹

Rev. Suttiphorn broached this issue with other ACTC Christians and found little support for an alternative approach. This led him to reflect that:

Some [ACTC Christians] would say that they have nothing to do with their old religion. But I say that’s not right, we are in the midst of this, we are only a few Christians, but we must be an example...Nowadays Christians in Central Thailand try to keep themselves separate. When they go to a ceremony as a group they go and sit under a tree a long way away and watch, which I don’t like. I am not saying that they are wrong in doing that, but that they should really join in.³⁰

Pastor Wicharn approached this issue in a similar way. He argued: “I question why, if they come to our church at Christmas, we don’t go to the temple with them when they invite us. Why are we so narrow minded?”³¹

²⁸ Pastor Pramuaphorn Sonserm, interview by C. R. Hillier.

²⁹ Rev. Suttiphorn Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier, 20 November 1998, Uthai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

C. Rejection of Thai Buddhism as a Religious System

Although there are indications of criticism from within ACTC, and the beginnings of a new approach towards Thai Buddhist culture, the majority of interviewees demonstrated an extremely restricted understanding of those aspects of Thai Buddhist culture in which it is legitimate for Christians to participate. The interviewees' rejection of Thai Buddhism has persuaded them not only to withdraw from Thai Buddhism, but also to contend that Buddhism has nothing to contribute to Christianity, and Christianity nothing to gain from Buddhism. Nineteen interviewees (63 percent) asserted that the two religions are incompatible. Christianity was believed to be complete without Buddhism, and superior to Buddhism. According to Pastor Mana: "All that we need is in the Bible. The teaching in the Bible is complete in itself. We do not need to add anything else. It just isn't necessary."³² Discussing the relative merits of Buddhism and Christianity, Teng commented: "When we have chosen something that is better, there is nothing we want to take. We don't regret anything, or want anything. It is not rejection, it is just that we don't want it."³³ Similarly, Pastor Thawat responded: "In my personal opinion the things that we have are much better."³⁴ Moreover, there was some criticism of Christians who had used aspects of Thai Buddhism in their practice of Christianity, particularly the Catholics. Pastor Boonsing commented:

Some aspects of Buddhism ought not to be brought over. For example; there are some places where Catholics have rituals which are similar to Buddhist rituals. Catholics have processions in which the priest's robes are carried. They also make merit in a way that is similar to Buddhist merit-making. Catholics are syncretistic as far as religious rites and ceremonies go....It is not fitting to take over these rituals. For this is a hallmark of trying to join religions together.³⁵

Eight interviewees (27 percent), however, did tentatively suggest ways in which Buddhism might contribute to Christianity. Yaud proposed that Christians could

³² Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

³³ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

³⁴ Pastor Thawat Yenchai, interview by C. R. Hillier, 17 March 1999, Chiangmai, tape recording, translated by L. Belandres.

³⁵ Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

learn from the Buddhist quality of community life.³⁶ Pastor Prawit suggested that Christians could benefit from the Buddhist discipline of meditation: “Buddhists learn to sit and meditate. When they believe in Jesus Christ they don’t sit and meditate anymore but they do sit and pray.”³⁷ Asked whether the discipline of meditation could be of benefit to the Christian, Pastor Prawit replied: “Yes, the Buddhist articles of belief are of no value for the Christian, but the practice of training the body is very good and may be of immense value for the Christian.”³⁸ Discussing the Buddhist and Christian teaching and practice of alms giving Pastor Somsak remarked: “It would be good if this Buddhist practice of giving was carried over by Christians in the giving of themselves and their resources to God.”³⁹ Songkhram and Pastor Somchai spoke about the benefits of Buddhist instruction for Christians, contending that Christians could draw on aspects of Buddhist teaching to supplement Christian teaching. Songkhram argued: “We can take and use their [Thai Buddhist’s] teaching about unity, harmony, mercy and kindness, because it is in harmony with God and His (*sic*) teaching on mercy, compassion and helping one another.”⁴⁰

Eleven interviewees (37 percent) commented on the Christian appropriation of Thai Buddhist festivals, particularly, Songkran and Loi Krathong, without specifically identifying that as a way in which Buddhism may contribute to Christianity. Although all the interviewees who spoke about these festivals believed that Christians could appropriate aspects of Songkran in the church, there was less agreement about the Christian adaptation of Loi Krathong since interviewees believed that the festival involved the participant in asking the river, rather than God, for forgiveness of past sins. Songkhram said:

I myself do not participate in this semi-religious festival. One must ask them why do they float these miniature boats. Is it only for the fun and pleasure of

³⁶ Yaud Phummun, interview by C. R. Hillier, 15 January 1999, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

³⁷ Pastor Prawit Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier, 3 November 1998, Uthai, tape recording, translated by C. R. Hillier.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁰ Songkhram Chanphaak, interview by C. R. Hillier.

it? What goal or purpose do they have? We also need to know by watching them. We are Christians, why do we need to float these miniature boats? They float them in order to ask forgiveness of the water. They call out 'oh god of the waters, we apologise'. But we have God, and God is the creator of the waters for us to take care of. This is something that God has created for us, so it behoves us to thank Him (*sic*). We apologise to God against whom we have done wrong, not to the water, for the water knows nothing.⁴¹

Those who explored ways in which Christians could participate in, and adapt aspects of, the festival contended that it could be reinterpreted within Christianity. They argued that instead of asking the river for forgiveness, Christian participants could use the occasion to thank God for the water,⁴² to remember the value of water,⁴³ and to thank God for forgiveness already received.⁴⁴ However, for the majority of interviewees, the divorce between Christianity and Buddhism prevented them exploring ways in which Buddhism might contribute to Christianity. Those who did suggest ways in which Thai Buddhism could enhance Christianity restricted their proposals to what they presumed to be cultural rather than religious aspects of Buddhism.

D. Articulation of Christian Beliefs

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to reporting and analysing the interviewees' understanding of key Christian doctrines that disclose the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism in general, with specific attention to major cosmological themes associated with Buddhism: *kamma*, merit, and spiritual patronage, in particular. The aim is to demonstrate how the interviewees' perception of God, obedience, and spirits relates to the Buddhist understanding of spiritual patronage, and how their perception of sin and salvation relates to the Buddhist understanding of *kamma* and merit. It will be argued in conclusion that, despite a strong rebuttal of Buddhism, the interviewees' understanding of Christianity is

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Pastor Surachai Chanwilak, interview by C. R. Hillier, 28 January 1999, Singburi, tape recording, translated by R. Bell.

⁴³ Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁴⁴ Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

significantly influenced by their Buddhist heritage, both before and after their conversion to Christianity.

1. God

In Buddhism there is no creating, or creator, spirit. As Harvey explains: “Buddhism sees no need for a creator of the world, as it postulates no ultimate beginning to the world, and regards it as sustained by natural laws.”⁴⁵ Weerasingha contends that *kamma* is the ultimate orientation point of Buddhist concern, not God: “The position accorded to God in any theistic system is simply accorded to *karma* in Buddhism.”⁴⁶ The interviewees disclosed a similar understanding. Teng stated: “Most Buddhists do not think about who God is. Everything is the outcome of something else, the law of consequences.”⁴⁷

In proclaiming the Gospel, OMF missionaries introduced the concept of the creator God. This proved to be a decisive factor in the interviewees’ conversion from Buddhism to Christianity. Fourteen of the interviewees (47 percent), recounting their conversion from Buddhism to Christianity, spontaneously recalled their early interest in the Christian concept of God. Eleven of the interviewees (37 percent) spoke specifically about God as the creator. Pastor Boonma’s comment is typical:

“I was wondering if it [the existence of a creator God] was true. I was not sure, because Buddhism teaches that men and women came into existence alone, and live in a world which belongs to nature. Nobody created nature. But, the Bible says that God created the earth, the sun, the stars, the moon, the animals, plants and men and women. I was intrigued by this.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 36.

⁴⁶ Tissa Weerasingha, *The Cross and the Bo Tree: Communicating the Gospel to Buddhists*, Asia Theological Association, 1989), 47.

⁴⁷ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean. There are two deviant cases one is Toob Maasatit. In his interview he declared, “I used to think that this world must surely have a creator. When I went to the fields to care for the buffalo, I had this feeling of awe, that made me think that someone must have created it all.” (Toob Maasatit, interview by C. R. Hillier.)

⁴⁸ Pastor Boonma Wayhuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Nine interviewees (30 percent) who discussed their initial interest in the existence of a god who created the world, recalled how they spontaneously concluded that if such a god, or spirit, existed it must be a source of immense power. Therefore they endeavoured to access this power for their own benefit. Sixteen of the interviewees (53 percent), recalling their conversion to Christianity, stated: "If God is... then He (*sic*) can..." Pastor Boonma's reflection is particularly lucid: "If God is who they say He (*sic*) is, and who I understand Him (*sic*) to be, then He (*sic*) can make me well."⁴⁹ Sanun, also turned to God for healing. He recounted:

At that time [initial exposure to Christianity] I said, 'If 'God' can help, then let this God of yours help me to be able to lift and drink a cup of water by myself, eat by myself, get myself into a sitting position by myself, get out of bed by myself, go to the toilet by myself.'⁵⁰

2. Obedience

Whether or not the interviewees spoke about their understanding of God as creator or described God as the one who, therefore, had the power to help them, many went on to disclose some kind of pledge they had made with God. Fourteen interviewees (47 percent) recalled vows they made with God when they converted to Christianity. Pastor Prawit recollected how he asked God for healing, and promised that if he were healed he would offer his allegiance to God: "I had promised God that if I got better, if Jesus Christ really did heal me, then I would ask Jesus into my life, and I said I would give my life to serve him."⁵¹ Riab recalled his conversion disclosing: "I had once made a vow to God that, if I still had life left in me, I would serve Him (*sic*)."⁵²

The interviewees' spontaneous disclosure of their initial understanding of and interaction with God would seem to indicate that they did not consider an understanding of God as an all-powerful spirit, or vow of obedience, to be incompatible with Christianity. However, a fuller analysis of the interviews suggests that, after converting to Christianity, the interviewees began to reevaluate their initial

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵¹ Pastor Prawit Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵² Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier.

perceptions of God. Although openly confessing that initially they understood God to be a spirit of immense power, who could be persuaded to act on their behalf in return for a pledge of allegiance, they also admitted that their initial understanding of God changed as they became more familiar with their Christian faith. Riab warned against evangelism that encourages enquirers to test or challenge God. He contended that Christians should not say, “If you believe in God, then you will get this and that.”⁵³ Similarly Sanun argued: “Praying to God is not simply a bargaining process.”⁵⁴ Their riposte indicates that although some Thai Christians do endeavour to manipulate God, in a manner comparable to the manipulation of traditional sources of power, this is not accepted by ACTC as a legitimate understanding of God or of human interaction with the divine. Unlike the spirit pantheon of Thai Buddhism, God is not considered to be capricious and open to manipulation.

3. Spirits

The interviewees’ conversion to Christianity not only entailed their acceptance of a radically new spiritual being, or God, but also initiated their revaluation of the original spirit pantheon of Thai Buddhism. The interviews disclose that they did not renounce their belief in the spirits of Thai Buddhism on conversion to Christianity, but reinterpreted the spirits in relation to God. All the interviewees indicated, either explicitly or implicitly, that they believed the spirits of Thai Buddhism to be unambiguously evil, in league with Satan and opposed to God. The frequent references to the spirits in the interviews indicates that although these Thai Christians understand the spirits differently to their Buddhist neighbours, the spirits continue to play a critical role in their lives as Christians.

Pastor Pramaphorn narrated an occasion when a spirit troubled her:

The spirit touched me but did not enter me. It came to tempt and speak to me. One night I was sleeping and I felt a pain in my stomach. When I opened my eyes there was a spirit sitting on my stomach, in the form of a man, only I knew that it wasn’t a man but a spirit...I prayed and drove it away in Jesus’ name. The spirit laughed wildly and said ‘Jesus doesn’t really love you’. It was

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

deceiving me....So I resisted....I didn't believe what Satan had to say. And I thought of what Jesus had said: 'Leave him!' That is when Jesus drove out the spirits and they went into the herd of pigs. As soon as I had brought this word of Jesus to mind, the thing left me alone.⁵⁵

The Christians' understanding of God, and of their relationship to God, convinced them that they were protected from these spiritual forces of evil. Pastor Mana insisted: "Before we gave honour to evil spirits, but now we believe in God. We no longer need to honour evil spirits and the spirits cannot do anything to harm us. God has the greater power."⁵⁶

4. Sin

The Buddhist belief that ill health is one of the consequences of sin is evident in the interviews. Pastor Boonmee, who contracted leprosy as a child, clearly understood his illness to be a direct result of his own sin: "That was what we believed. People said that I had done something wrong in the past, before I was born, and that was why I was sick in this life."⁵⁷ Asked whether or not he accepted this belief as a Buddhist he replied: "Yes, I understood it that way... It was a standard in our belief. People were just expressing what they believed."⁵⁸ It is apparent that those who identified sin with ill health did so quite consciously in relation to their heritage of Buddhist beliefs.

The Buddhist belief that ill health was a consequence of past sins meant that the interviewees who were unwell, with leprosy or other serious illness, readily identified themselves as sinners, both as Buddhists, and later as Christians. Exposure to the Christian teaching that all men and women were sinners simply confirmed the conviction they held as Buddhists that they were sinners. All the interviewees who were unwell spontaneously recalled that they understood themselves to be sinners prior to their conversion to Christianity. Pastor Boonma's remarks are characteristic

⁵⁵ Pastor Pramuaphorn Sonserm, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵⁶ Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵⁷ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

of those who were unwell: "I knew what sin was and I knew I was a sinner. Buddhism taught me that much."⁵⁹

The comments of the interviewees who were unwell disclose various understandings of the term *baab*, all of which reveal the influence of the Buddhist teaching. Firstly, the interviewees who were unwell understood *baab* to refer to sinful actions. Sanun was typical in commenting that he knew what sin was, but was unable to avoid it because he could not obey the law.⁶⁰ This discloses his acceptance of the Buddhist understanding that sin refers to contravening the moral law. Secondly, the interviewees who were unwell believed that sinful actions had dire consequences for the sinner. They believed that their illness was a direct result of their previous sins, and that they were condemned to further suffering because of their sin. Three of the interviewees who were unwell (33 percent of the unwell interviewees, 10 percent of the total number of interviewees) disclosed that before they converted to Christianity they were afraid of hell. Pastor Boonmee repeatedly said that he was frightened of going to hell because he knew he was a sinner: "Buddhism taught us to be afraid of sinning. If you sin then you have to go to hell. It is the same as when you break the law and have to go to jail." He recalled his response on hearing the Gospel: "I told him [OMF missionary] that I was interested in Christianity because I knew that I was a sinner. I thought that leprosy was a direct consequence of my sin and that I was going to hell."⁶¹ Thirdly, four interviewees who were unwell at the time of their exposure to Christianity (44 percent of the unwell interviewees, 13 percent of the total number of interviewees) spoke about salvation from sin in terms of escape from fate, thus implying a relationship between sin and fate. Pastor Phlern Yanyiam exclaimed that, as Christians, "Jesus could forgive our sins, we could escape from hell and our cycle of fate."⁶² Later on in the interview he emphasised that "those

⁵⁹ Pastor Boonma Wayhuay, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁰ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶¹ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier..

⁶² Pastor Phlern Yanyiam, interview by C. R. Hillier, 27 January 1999, Saraburi, tape recording, translated by A Ellard..

who come to him [Jesus] can be set free from their fate... Christianity told me about a Saviour who could release me from my fate and sin.”⁶³

By contrast only five interviewees who were well at the time of their conversion (23 percent of well interviewees, 17 percent of the total number of interviewees) said that they understood themselves to be sinners while they were Buddhists. On the other hand three interviewees who were well (14 percent of well interviewees, 10 percent of the total number of interviewees) recalled that they did not initially understand the Christian teaching about sin, or identify themselves as sinners as Christianity taught, before they converted to Christianity. Pastor Ratchanee explained the reasons for this as follows: she was born into a good family, “where we never stole, never argued and fought, or anything like that.”⁶⁴ Seven interviewees who were well (33 percent of well interviewees, 23 percent of the total number of interviewees) said that an understanding of sin only became important to them after conversion. Yaud recalled that it was a number of years after his baptism before he appreciated the significance of the Christian teaching on sin.⁶⁵

It is evident that the well interviewees, as well as the unwell interviewees, were influenced by Buddhist beliefs about sin/*baab*. The well interviewees, as much as the unwell interviewees, understood *baab* to refer to sinful actions that had negative consequences for the sinner. While the unwell interviewees interpreted adverse life-circumstances, in particular ill health, to be a consequence of their own sin, the interviewees who were well interpreted favourable life-circumstances to reflect their own sinlessness, or, more accurately, their own accumulation of merit. Therefore the interviewees who were well did not initially identify themselves as sinners or consider sin to be a significant factor in their conversion to Christianity.

After their conversions all the interviewees began to reassess their initial understanding of sin. Those who had identified themselves as sinners, and said that

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁵ Yaud Phummun, interview by C. R. Hillier.

an understanding of sin was important to them prior to their conversion, questioned the significance, and the sufficiency, of this initial understanding. Teng, who suffered with leprosy in his earlier life, had understood himself to be a sinner, but recalled that after converting to Christianity he realised that he had not initially understood what Christians meant by *baab*. He inferred that his initial understanding of sin, both as a Buddhist and on conversion to Christianity, was inadequate and had to be profoundly developed within Christianity.⁶⁶ Those who had not identified themselves as sinners, and did not consider an understanding of sin to be important to them prior to their conversion, also began to reassess their initial understanding of sin. The significance that these Christians attributed to a correct understanding of sin is evident by the fact that three interviewees (10 percent) adjusted the date of their conversion to Christianity to correspond with the date from which they understood the Christian concept of sin. After describing an initial conversion experience Pastor Ratchanee concluded: “I know that I was not born again because I had never understood what sin meant.”⁶⁷ Pastor Ratchanee proceeded to describe a subsequent experience when she understood what Christians meant by sin, identified herself as a sinner, and was ‘born again’. Similarly, Pastor Wicharn talked about his conversion to Christianity and decision to study the Bible at Phayao Bible College. He insisted that it was not until he was at Bible College that he understood what sin was and identified himself as a sinner. He went on to describe another conversion experience, which he now understands as the beginning of his Christian life.⁶⁸

The interviewees’ reassessment of their initial understanding of sin persuaded them to emphasise at least two facets of the Christian doctrine of sin.⁶⁹ Firstly, they stressed their belief that, for Christians, *baab* denotes a state of being that is intrinsic to human nature. This understanding of sin was enlarged in many of the interviews.

⁶⁶ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁶⁷ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁸ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁶⁹ The data generated from the interviews discloses two principal emphases. However, the research represents a preliminary exploration of the ACTC’s doctrine of sin and does not preclude the disclosure of alternative understandings by future research.

Pastor Samphan argued: "Suppose Buddhism did teach people what to do and then those people went and did it; sin (*baab*) would still be within."⁷⁰ Pastor Boonmee stressed that, "Sin is already inside us; stealing and killing are just the results of our sin."⁷¹ The same point was echoed by Riab: "Sin is in our very being."⁷² However, not all the interviewees agreed that an understanding of humanity as essentially sinful is unique to Christianity. Pastor Prasit questioned how far this Christian belief is different from the Buddhist understanding of humanity. He argued that although Buddhism does not teach that sin is an essential aspect of human nature, or that humanity is essentially sinful, Buddhism does expound on the theme of the evil nature of the human heart. Pastor Prasit said: "We say that sin comes from the heart, according to Mark 7:21, we have evil thoughts, adultery, anger, jealousy. All this we don't really need to tell them [Buddhists], they know already, because Buddhism teaches that the heart is evil."⁷³

Reflecting on the understanding of sin as intrinsic to human nature, Riab made a significant connection between the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Buddhist doctrine of desire. Buddhism, he agreed, teaches that escape from the cycle of birth and death is achieved by extinguishing desire. But, he argued, Buddhists accept that this is not possible in their life-time. Desire, he concluded, remains an intrinsic part of humanity, just as sin is understood by Christians to be part of human nature. Arguing against the Christian understanding of 'sinless perfection' he contended:

I have heard them speaking on the hospital wards. They have come and disputed with me. I said that as long as we have life in this world and have still not died, sin is not finished or ended in us. As long as we are able to eat, we still have desires.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Samphan Direksuk, interview by C. R. Hillier, 12 January 1999, Manorom, Chainat, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

⁷¹ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷² Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷³ Pastor Prasit Yaakham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁴ Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier. Riab uses the term *jaak* for desire. This is a simple verb without the religious denotations of the term *tanha*. However, the context suggests that Riab is investing the simple term *jaak* with religious meaning of the term *tanha*. *Tanha* is a specifically

Although Riab was alone in making the connection between the Christian doctrine of sin and the Buddhist doctrine of desire his insight is significant. He was a senior monk within the Buddhist *Sangha* before converting to Christianity and has taken a particular interest in exploring the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.

Secondly, the interviewees' reassessment of their initial understanding of sin reflects the Christian doctrine of sin. Thus they insisted that sin marks a disruption of the human relationship with God. The interviewees described sin as "rebellion against God,"⁷⁵ "not knowing God,"⁷⁶ and "not acknowledging our creator."⁷⁷ Pastor Ratchanee explained: "Thai people think of sin as killing animals, cutting off life, lies. That is sin to them. But true sin is not acknowledging God who has created us."⁷⁸ Teng emphasised:

You have got to take time in explaining about sin. Thai people understand that bad people are sinners, and people who don't obey the religious precepts are sinners. The teaching that we sin towards God is not a Thai concept. You have got to take a lot of time to explain it.⁷⁹

After gaining a deepening appreciation of the Christian doctrine of sin, particularly the Christian belief that sin is intrinsic to human nature, four interviewees (13 percent) contended that the Buddhist term *weenkam* more appropriately expresses the Christian understanding of sin. They felt that *weenkam* expresses the Christian affirmation that sin is intrinsic to human nature better than the term *baab*. Pastor Somchai contended that the Buddhist understanding of *weenkam*, and Christian use of the term *baab*, refer to the same concept. He argued that in adopting the term *baab* from Buddhism, rather than *weenkam* the missionaries have had to radically redefine

Buddhist term which means craving. Nyanatiloka explains, "craving is the chief root of suffering, and of the ever continuing cycle of rebirths" (Nyanatiloka ed., *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 4th revised edition (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1997), 207).

⁷⁵ Pastor Prawit Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁶ Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁷ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

the meaning of *baab*. He concluded that this has contributed to misunderstanding between Christians and Buddhists: “Thai people do not use the word *baab*, but *weenkam*. That is the consequences of good and bad deeds they have done in the past. Therefore, they do not understand the Christian concept of *baab*.”⁸⁰ Five other interviewees (17 percent) said that they use both terms to explain the Christian concept of sin to Thai Buddhists. Suphot said: “I use their concepts, all Thai people understand about *weenkam*. This means the sin that has been with us from birth. How can we escape this?”⁸¹ However, Pastor Somchai said that although he would use the term *weenkam* in the course of evangelism, he would be reluctant to use it within a Christian context; rather, once his listener understood the Christian concept of sin, he would revert to the established Christian term, *baab*.⁸² Pastor Prasit also said that he would use the term *weenkam* rather than *baab* when explaining Christianity to a Buddhist, but expressed concern that this might lead to misunderstanding:

Sometimes I would [use those terms] because they are words that they [Buddhists] would understand, and they mean sin. But they would understand that it was sin that they had accumulated in their past life. If they are poor they would think it was because of sin from their past life which is effecting them now.⁸³

Fifteen interviewees (50 percent) adamantly opposed the use of the term *weenkam* either as a means of evangelism or in articulating Christian beliefs about sin.

5. Salvation

The interview data indicates that the interviewees accepted a radically different soteriology when converting from Christianity to Buddhism. Rejecting the Buddhist belief that salvation was dependent on one’s self, and one’s own merit, they affirmed the Christian conviction that salvation is dependent on a saviour, Jesus Christ. Riab articulated this understanding particularly well:

As I got going reading the Bible I thought about both Buddhism and Christianity. Both systems taught us to be good people. But in practice they

⁸⁰ Pastor Somchai Phromthaisong, interview by C. R. Hillier, 5 November 1998, Nakhon Sawan, tape recording, translated by C. R. Hillier.

⁸¹ Suphot Sriprasaad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸² Pastor Somchai Phromthaisong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸³ Pastor Prasit Yaakham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

were quite different, and so also was the faith of each. For Buddhism, though very detailed, is the weaker; each person has to rely on self and save oneself. I myself thought, 'How much must a person help himself before he gained some benefit?'. But Christianity teaches that we cannot help or save ourselves. If we do wrong, then we must confess our sin, then God will forgive us and erase our sin. I firmly believe that Christianity is a very good religion, for it is able to save people from their sins. But other religions are not able to save people from their sins; one has to save oneself. This has been my thinking from then until now, a period of thirty years.⁸⁴

The interviewees endeavoured to express this alternative soteriology, and emerging Christology, by using Thai Buddhist terms and concepts. One of the ways they did this was to describe Christ as the one who breaks the power of *weenkam*. Eleven interviewees (37 percent) spontaneously described Jesus as the one who breaks the power of *weenkam*, or responded positively to that description of Jesus. For example, Pastor Phlern contended: "Jesus is the saviour who enables us to escape from the cycle of *weenkam*."⁸⁵ Later in the interview he stated: "The cycle of *weenkam* will only be broken by Jesus."⁸⁶ Sanun commented: "Buddhists think that when they sin they are piling up *kam*. That is why they have to do what they do and serve as they serve. So I tell them that Jesus has come to rescue them from exactly what they call *kam*."⁸⁷

How Jesus is understood to break the cycle of *weenkam* is expressed in at least two ways. First, Jesus is understood to have achieved release from *weenkam* by nullifying the effect of fate in his life and in his death. Songkhram stated: "Jesus brings this vicious cycle to an end so that you need not receive again the consequences of past evil deeds, for Jesus has received and carried all those consequences."⁸⁸ Second, Jesus is understood as being able to release others from *weenkam* by making merit for them. Pastor Winitchai insisted: "Salvation from sin (*baab*) comes through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of his merit that we can escape

⁸⁴ Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁵ Pastor Phlern Yanyiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁶ Pastor Prasit Yaakham, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁷ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁸⁸ Songkhram Chanphaak, interview by C. R. Hillier.

retribution (*weenkam*).”⁸⁹ Similarly, Toob remarked: “Jesus Christ does not have to make any more merit because his life made enough merit to redeem the sin of the whole world.”⁹⁰

However, not all the interviewees agreed that these are acceptable or appropriate ways of expressing their understanding of Christ. Sixteen interviewees (53 percent) adamantly rejected the suggestion that Jesus be described as the one who breaks the power of *weenkam*. Pastor Boonmee argued that Christians should not say that Jesus is the one who makes merit for us, because Buddhists will then think that Jesus is the same as the Buddha.⁹¹ Supporting this line of argument Teng contended:

If you translate *tham bun* (to make merit) it means to do good. We have to ask what it means to do good, to show mercy. Many Buddhists understand *tham bun* to be the performance of Buddhist actions. Using it leads to misunderstanding. Jesus did not come to *tham bun* but to help.⁹²

When asked how Jesus helped, Teng replied: “He [Jesus] came to serve, he healed the paralytic, revived the dead, exorcised the spirits, healed diseases, fed 5,000, and he announced the good-news of the Gospel.”⁹³

6. Doing good

As well as beginning to develop an indigenous Thai Christian Christology, the interviewees showed evidence of a nascent Christian theology of *tham bun*. Critiquing the Buddhist doctrine of *tham bun* they contended that the accumulation of demerit is inevitable because it is not possible for any one consistently to obey the Buddhist law. They also argued that, even if one could obey the Buddhist moral code, obedience to that code would not ensure release from the adverse effects of

⁸⁹ Pastor Winitchai Chaimawong, interview by C. R. Hillier, 19 February 1999, Manorum, Chainat, tape recording, translated by U. Fewster.

⁹⁰ Toob Maasatit, interview by C. R. Hillier. Interestingly Buddhists already believe that merit made be transferred to another. For example, Buddhists believe that a son’s ordination makes merit for the parents, and that friends and relatives can make merit for the deceased after their death.

⁹¹ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹² Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

⁹³ Ibid.

baab, or from *weenkam*. They then endeavoured to offer an alternative Christian interpretation of *tham bun*.

All the interviewees explicitly rejected the Buddhist belief that one can save one's self. Pastor Songkhram argued: "If we rely on ourselves, we will fail; it is not possible to rely on ourselves, for it is far too difficult."⁹⁴ Critiquing this pivotal Buddhist belief, eighteen interviewees (60 percent) argued that as Buddhists, prior to their conversion to Christianity, they were unable to obey even the most basic five commands of Buddhism. Referring to Jesus' teaching that to break one facet of the law is to break the whole law, Pastor Songkhram rejected this aspect of Buddhist soteriology. He contended:

These five commands which you [Thai Buddhist] must keep are foundational to Buddhism. We all know that well, but we are not able to keep them. We break the first, and that is like breaking the lot....The five principles are like links in a chain; they are like a bridge that will take you to heaven. These five commands are all of one piece, a single entity. If we fail in one, then we will fail, for you have failed to keep the whole thing. One must keep the lot in order to benefit from them.⁹⁵

Interestingly, Pastor Songkhram's critique of Buddhism is invalid within the Buddhist context. A Buddhist is not understood to have broken the whole law if (s)he disobeys only one command. Moreover, a Buddhist may rectify the ill effects of breaking any one aspect of the law by actively making more merit. Pastor Songkhram's critique of Buddhism only makes sense within the Christian context. This illustrates that he was using a Christian understanding of the law to critique Buddhist soteriology.

The interviewees were adamant that no one can consistently obey the Buddhist moral code so as to achieve their own salvation. They also contended that, even if one could obey the law, obedience to the law would not resolve the problem of *baab*, or ensure release from *weenkam*. Riab commented:

⁹⁴ Songkhram Chanphaak, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

I studied my former religion in depth. I now think that this system cannot save a person, for we have to save ourselves, but it cannot be done. We can help ourselves a bit, but as far as cleansing our sins away goes, we are not able to do that at all. Sin is in our very being. How can we wash it out? We don't have supernatural power and authority, like God has.⁹⁶

Later on in the interview Riab said:

I have studied the Buddhist text books, and I have gained a considerable knowledge of Buddhism. I learned that we have to rely on ourselves and save ourselves. But one's self cannot help, that is for sure. It can help in only one thing, namely the matter of doing good, but this 'good' cannot save us from our sins.⁹⁷

Interestingly, Riab, like Songkhram, uses a Christian teaching to critique Buddhism. He uses the Christian understanding of sin as intrinsic to human nature to critique Buddhism's ability to deal with sin.

Although the interviewees believe that the accumulation of demerit, or sin, is inevitable, and that making merit cannot resolve the problem of sin, the data generated from the interviews indicates that at least seven interviewees (23 percent) believe that doing good may ensure them a better existence in this life. Sanun commented: "If you agree to have Jesus as your friend, to be your God, you will receive good things."⁹⁸ Asked to clarify this statement he replied: "you will definitely go to heaven, and the things which you have never yet experienced in this world you will receive from God as rewards."⁹⁹ Encouraged to state his views on merit more precisely, he said: "In this life you will receive peace."¹⁰⁰ Pastor Mana, discussing his decision to serve God as a pastor, remarked: "I understood that serving Christ would not make me rich, and it would be difficult, but that it would also bring great rewards, both in this world and the next."¹⁰¹ The rewards and blessings referred to by these Christians are not restricted to the spiritual, or to the next world. They also

⁹⁶ Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Pastor Mana Suanboon, interview by C. R. Hillier, 4 November 1998, Banrai, Uthai, tape recording, translated by R. Hillier.

refer to physical blessings that may be experienced in this world. Pastor Boonsing commented: "Sometimes I sell well, and tell my contact, 'God has blessed me this day', I am faithful to God, so God helps me in this."¹⁰² Pastor Notsit remarked that the reason Thai Christians are reluctant to testify about their faith is because they are embarrassed by their poverty: "Often people who become Christians speak about how Jesus will provide for them. Why then does he not always do so, and why isn't there even one rich family? If God were to really take care of families, then they wouldn't need to go to work."¹⁰³

The evidence suggests that while the interviewees have rejected some aspects of Buddhist soteriology, particularly the belief that *baab* and *weenkam* may be dealt with by making merit (*tham bun*), they have continued other aspects of Buddhist soteriology, principally the belief that there is an ideal moral order within which good should be rewarded with good and evil with evil. However, the interviewees' comments reveal an alternative understanding of 'doing good' or 'making merit' which can legitimately be said to represent an emerging Christian theology of *tham bun*. They proposed a theory, a praxis, and a means of *tham bun* that are consciously alternative to those of Thai Buddhism.

In terms of a theoretical understanding of *tham bun*, Pastor Mana contended that Thai Christians need to "have a new way of thinking" when doing good, in order to "know why they are doing it."¹⁰⁴ Reflecting on the difference between Buddhist and Christian understandings Sanun argued that some Thai Christians "do the right thing, but not in the right way."¹⁰⁵ He suspected that some Thai Christians engage in Christian religious activities with the belief that they will have the same effect as Buddhist religious activities: attending church, listening to the sermon, and presenting their tithe - each understood in the same way as attending the temple,

¹⁰² Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰³ Pastor Notsit Kamnerdnathee, interview by C. R. Hillier, 4 November 1998, Banrai, Uthai, tape recording, translated by J. Trelogan.

¹⁰⁴ Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁵ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

listening to the monks and presenting their candles and incense. He argued that this was wrong. Other interviewees similarly argued that although Christian practices may appear to be similar to Buddhist practices, the underlying beliefs are quite different. The Christian understanding of 'doing good' is different, they maintained, from the Buddhist understanding of *tham bun*.

Pastor Mana sought to explain this by means of an illustration. He recalled how he once gave a glass of water to a passing monk, explaining to the monk that, as a Christian, he was not trying to make merit by offering him water:

I tried to get him [the monk] to understand that I wasn't making merit in the Buddhist sense, and tried to explain to him what Christians mean by making merit. I explained that if anyone is hungry, and I have food, I will give them something to eat. In the same way, if anyone is begging, and I have money, I will help them.¹⁰⁶

Later in the interview Pastor Mana clarified how he understood the difference:

The Buddhist way is to do in order to receive. Our way is to believe in God, God gives to us first and then we do. It is not that we do good in order to receive. Buddhists do good in order to obtain good, they make merit in order to obtain merit. But we have it all now, because of what God has done and given to us. When we do good, it is not to obtain, but because we are remembering God's grace given to us.¹⁰⁷

In a similar way Pastor Winitchai described how he reached the decision to serve God:

It [the decision] originated from knowing that God is the creator and that he wants to use our lives. God has shown much grace and mercy towards us in many ways, so I wanted to reciprocate in some way: like we say in Thai, 'to return good for good'...but in the language we Christians use we say it's rewarding or returning God's grace.¹⁰⁸

The evidence suggests that the interviewees do good, or *tham bun*, not in order to receive the benefits of making merit, but because they understand themselves to have already received the grace and mercy of God. However, Pastor Thawat Yenchai, aware of this interpretation of *tham bun*, argued that it is wrong to enter Christian

¹⁰⁶ Pastor Mana Suanboon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Pastor Winitchai Chaimawong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

service – in his case ordained ministry - believing that one is in debt to God and that by serving God one can in some way repay that debt.¹⁰⁹

In terms, secondly, of a Christian praxis of *tham bun*, the interviewees acknowledged that after conversion to Christianity they lost their earlier motivation, or obligation, as Buddhists to contribute to the Buddhist community, and had consequently experienced a tendency to withdraw from the Buddhist community. They were eager to challenge this position of non-involvement. They contended that being a Christian, and ceasing to *tham bun* as a Buddhist, does not entail withdrawal from community life. Rather, Christians should be actively involved in their community. Arguing against non-involvement Pastor Mana challenged the common contention that Christians should not be involved in Buddhist practices. He contended that the criterion for deciding whether a Christian should participate in any given activity is whether it is consistent with Christianity. Pastor Mana believes that although there are some Buddhist merit-making practices that Christians should not be involved in, there are others that Christians may continue and adopt. Pastor Boonmee expressed the same understanding:

We should behave in accordance with our beliefs. We know that we receive salvation by our faith. God has already written our names in his book. Therefore we have to do everything in order to show our faith. For example, we know now that we are sons of God, who is holy, so we should not do anything that is against this belief.¹¹⁰

The evidence suggests that at least three interviewees (10 percent) believe that Christians may participate in activities that Buddhists consider to be merit-making, providing the activities are consistent with Christian faith.

In terms of their understanding of the power by which Christians *tham bun*, several of the interviewees contended that, as Christians, they had access to an alternative source of power, which enabled them to do good. Pastor Mana insisted:

Many people think that being a Christian consists of a list of things that you mustn't do: merit-making, drinking, smoking, betel nut chewing, lying,

¹⁰⁹ Pastor Thawat Yenchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁰ Pastor Boonmee Meelon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

stealing. Before people have really met with God this is all impossible. Once they have really met with God they are enabled to change these things.¹¹¹

This contention is consistent with the interviewees' critique of Buddhism. They asserted that one of the reasons Buddhism fails to mediate salvation is because it is not possible to do good as a human person. They argued that Christianity succeeds, not only because it teaches Christians that they are no longer dependent upon their own good deeds for salvation, but also because faith in Jesus empowers them to do good. The interviewees believed that Christians are enabled to *tham bun* by the power of God, rather than by depending on their own strength.

7. The Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Religious Culture

The interviewees were encouraged to express their understanding of the relationship between the presence and purposes of God in relation to Thai Buddhism. In response to a number of probing questions it was ascertained that thirteen interviewees (43 percent) believed that God was present in Thai Buddhist culture. They described it in a number of different ways. Six interviewees (20 percent) identified God with what Thai religious thought describes as 'all the sacred things in the universe.' For example Pastor Arphon argued:

Thai people, who are not Christians, don't worship God, but they habitually speak thus: 'May the Sacred things in the Universe...' What are the sacred things in the world? They are God. They [Thai Buddhists] know that there is a person who has supernatural power over all the world.¹¹²

He made a comparison between Thai Buddhists who appeal to the sacred things in the world, and Greeks whom Paul described as worshipping the God they do not know (Acts 17). Thus he concluded that although Thai Buddhists "did not speak directly about God, nevertheless they called up on that which, (or who), is sacred in the world."¹¹³ He described this as "an innate knowledge of God."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Pastor Mana Suanboon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹² Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, interview by C. R. Hillier.

Pastor Boonsing also referred to 'all the sacred things in the universe' when describing the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture. He contended that in the past when Buddhists "asked for sacred things or blessings, they said, 'May the Sacred things in the Universe...' Using these terms indicates that the 'sacred things in the world' must be our God."¹¹⁵ He also related the sacred things in the world to nature, arguing that nature discloses the existence of the Transcendent. In this way both Pastor Arphon and Pastor Boonsing agreed that *phracaw*, identified as 'all the sacred things in the universe,' is known to Buddhists who, when communicating with 'all the sacred things in the universe,' are communicating with *phracaw*.

Four interviewees (13 percent) maintained that the Buddhist sense of morality is an indication of the presence of God. Pastor Mana argued that the human conscience is a gift of God, and signifies the presence of God: "God has given it [conscience] to us in our hearts so that we know what is good and what is not good."¹¹⁶ Pastor Mana related this moral sense to the sacred things in the universe arguing that, "When they [Buddhists] do wrong, or do things that are not right, they fear this sacred thing."¹¹⁷ These assertions seem to infer to not only a belief in the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture, but also a conviction that at least some Buddhists are conscious of a relationship between their moral sense and the sacred things.

Songkhram contended, on the other hand, that it is an inner longing, rather than a sense of morality, that indicates the presence of God among Thai Buddhists. He argued that God instigated a state of dissatisfaction in Thai Buddhist society in order to cause people to seek God:

I think that this common feeling of not being satisfied in heart, of not having done enough, is something that God has brought about in human beings to ensure that they will keep on seeking. The fact that they are not satisfied in the things which they have is something which God has planted in their hearts.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Pastor Boonsing Suphan, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁶ Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Songkhram Chanphaak, interview by C. R. Hillier.

The interviewees who took this view were, however, eager to distinguish between an acknowledgement of God's presence in Thai Buddhist culture and in Thai Buddhism as a religion. When Pastor Arphon, who identified 'the sacred things in the universe' with God, was asked about the relationship between the presence of God and Thai Buddhism he proceeded to talk about spirits and the role spirits play in Thai Buddhism. He insisted that the spirits "harm", "kill", and "destroy", and concluded: "We cannot speak of God having a part in these actions."¹¹⁹ Those who related God's presence to the existence of the human conscience were unwilling to make the connection between, what they understood to be the divinely enlightened human conscience, and the moral teachings of Buddhism. Instead of reflecting on a possible divine influence on the development of the Buddhist teachings, they contended that Buddhist teachings are of human origin. Pastor Ratchanee's understanding is typical of these interviewees. She argued that human beings "think up religion in order to try to find a way of salvation, so that rules have been worked out from man's (*sic*) conscience."¹²⁰ Similarly, Songkhram contended that although God instigates the desire for the Transcendent, this is not satisfied within Buddhism. Pastor Suphon, of all the interviewees, came closest to identifying the presence of God with Buddhism. He admitted that God might "allow" the development of Buddhism, contending: "We cannot say that God 'used' Buddhism, that is too strong, God allowed Buddhism to evolve."¹²¹

All the interviewees were more comfortable identifying Thai Buddhism with the presence of Satan, rather than with the presence of God. Typical of these is Rev. Suttiphorn who contended: "Satan is the one behind religion, deceiving people, taking us further away from God. Instead of us returning to God and believing in him we shut our eyes and ears."¹²² This understanding of Thai Buddhism is significantly influenced by the interviewees' belief that Thai Buddhism and spirit propitiation are

¹¹⁹ Pastor Arphon Chaleerin, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁰ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²¹ Pastor Suphon Yoodee, interview by C. R. Hillier, 19 November 1998, Uthai, tape recording, translated by U. Fewster.

¹²² Rev. Suttiphorn Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

intrinsically related. They considered the spirits of Thai religion to be demonic, and therefore identified Buddhism as demonic because its association with the spirits. For example, Pastor stated that, Thai Buddhists “are bound in Buddhism, and evil spirits, and demons to a great extent.”¹²³

8. Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?

The majority of interviewees, whether or not they were willing to identify the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture, believed that there was a significant possibility that Thai Buddhists might receive salvation without an explicit knowledge of Christ. Twenty interviewees (67 percent) believed that there was a definite possibility that Thai Buddhists might receive salvation. Only ten interviewees (33 percent) were adamant that there was no possibility of Thai Buddhists receiving salvation.

The post-death state of Buddhist friends and relations emerged as a vital issue in the interviews. Twenty-three interviewees (77 percent) were first-generation Christians and many of their immediate relatives were Buddhists. When asked about the post-death state of Buddhists who had not heard about Christ, Pastor Wicharn replied: “This question is very difficult. I used to ask the question myself, where will my Grandparents be for they do not know about God.”¹²⁴ Suphot spoke about his concern for his father:

I know that in his life my father showed love to others, helped others, didn't think of just himself, cared for others. I don't know what God's plan would be. I know from the Bible that we must believe in order to be saved. We know this but my father never heard. I don't know what God thinks about this.¹²⁵

The interviewees had discussed these issues with other Thai Christians and had sought the advice of foreign missionaries. Teng recalled:

I asked the missionaries this. I asked many who have had a lot of training and teaching. I asked them if the Israelites who died before Jesus Christ came will

¹²³ Pastor Prawit Somchai, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁴ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁵ Suphot Sriprasaad, interview by C. R. Hillier.

be saved. The missionaries said that they could not answer that question, but that according to Scripture it looks as if they have no way of being saved.¹²⁶

Likewise, to his question about Thais who had died before the missionaries arrived, he recalled them saying: “It is a very difficult question and we can’t answer it.”¹²⁷

Deliberation over this issue persuaded many of the interviewees to believe that there must be an alternative way by which Thai Buddhists without any exposure to Christianity might be saved. Pastor Surachai Chanwilak’s understanding is not untypical: “The God whom I worship is just, and God has laws which may be beyond or extra to what has been recorded in the Bible. But it is with God and beyond my understanding.”¹²⁸ In like manner Sanun commented: “God understands that the reason they can’t come to Jesus is because they did not previously know about these things, that then constitutes a special case.”¹²⁹

Given the interviewees’ negative assessment of Thai Buddhism it is not surprising that they did not feel free to explore how Thai Buddhism might contribute to that “special case,” or be part of the “laws which may be beyond or extra to what is recorded in the Bible.” Three of those who discussed how salvation might be mediated to Thai Buddhists (10 percent) rejected any relationship between that salvation and Thai Buddhism. The other seventeen interviewees (57 percent), who believed there was a definite possibility that Thai Buddhists might receive salvation, did not wish to explore this in terms of salvation being mediated through Buddhism, but in terms of how salvation can be mediated to Buddhists.

Discussing how salvation might be mediated to those who had no appreciation of Christianity, four interviewees (13 percent) argued that anyone who seeks for God will find God, irrespective of when or where they lived. Thus Pastor Ratchanee contended: “When there is someone who is truly searching for God, they may be

¹²⁶ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Pastor Surachai Chanwilak, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹²⁹ Sanun Muangchui, interview by C. R. Hillier.

within their own religion, but their hearts reach out to someone who is very great, who is God, I believe they may receive the mercy of God.”¹³⁰ Similarly, Pastor Pramuaphorn maintained: “People who genuinely seek will surely have the opportunity to receive salvation.”¹³¹ Three interviewees (10 percent) considered that having faith in ‘another’, or the ‘other’, was the critical factor. For example Pastor Mana reflected: “Those people have faith, but I am not sure if their faith is in God or just the keeper of life. But whether they reverence sacred things or God, it is reverence.”¹³² Pastor Phlern compared Thai Buddhists without an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ with Israelites who lived before the advent of Jesus Christ. He remarked: “All are able to receive God’s grace whether it was in the period before Jesus died or after. Before Jesus died, in the time of the Old Testament, there were those who had faith, and God reckoned their faith as righteousness.”¹³³

As well as exploring the potential significance of humanity’s search for God, and faith in the ‘other’, eleven interviewees (37 percent) developed the idea that God deals with different individuals, or communities, in different ways. Frequently the interviewees talked about how those who have the law will be judged by the law, while those who do not have the law, will be judged differently. Pastor Phlern contended: “I believe that God will judge them according to what they have done. God is truly just. Those who have no laws, God will judge as those who have no laws.”¹³⁴ Seven interviewees (23 percent) explored how the human conscience might provide an alternative basis for divine judgement. Pastor Wicharn said: “God created human beings with a conscience. They are able to decide what is right and wrong, and what is good and what is bad.”¹³⁵ Pastor Suphon described how the human conscience and the law of God are in harmony with one another: human conscience was created “in accordance with God’s law to be morally perceptive of right and

¹³⁰ Pastor Ratchanee Chanwongthong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³¹ Pastor Pramuaphorn Sonserm, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³² Pastor Mana Noomaa, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³³ Pastor Phlern Yanyiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Pastor Wicharn Khowiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

wrong.”¹³⁶ Pastor Phlern contended: “They [ie. Buddhists] have a standard that makes them want to do good, and they behave well, even though they do not know about God.”¹³⁷ The interviewees who spoke about righteousness according to the human conscience, rather than righteousness according to the law, contended that righteousness itself is not the means of salvation. They asserted that salvation is dependent upon the grace and mercy of God rather than any act(s) of righteousness, whether in accordance with the law or the human conscience. Those interviewees who were unable to imagine how the grace and mercy of God might be mediated to those outwith Christianity were also unable to explore how the salvation of Thai Buddhists without an explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ might be possible.

Thirteen of the interviewees (43 percent) described how the salvation of God might be mediated to individuals after they have died. This may reflect a Christian utilisation of the Buddhist understanding of the state of the human spirit after death. Commonly Thai Buddhists believe that the spirit of one who has died maintains a conscious existence in a temporary state or location, either heaven or hell. Significantly Thai Christian interviewees, in contrast to most OMF missionaries, believed that the spirit of the deceased remains conscious and that salvation might be mediated to individuals after they have died if, in the post-death state, they hear and respond to the Gospel.

Several interviewees disclosed their belief that God may speak to people in this post-death state, communicating the Gospel to them and enabling them to respond and receive salvation. Pastor Mana’s comment is typical: “God is righteous and just, I am sure that those who have died without hearing will have an opportunity to hear and be able to believe. In that case they will move, from the place of departed spirits, to heaven.”¹³⁸ An interesting variation on the theme of being able to hear and respond to the message of Christianity after death is the interviewees’ understanding of how Jesus preached to the spirits in hell, described in 1 Peter 3:18-20. This scripture was

¹³⁶ Pastor Suphon Yoodee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁷ Pastor Phlern Yanyiam, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹³⁸ Pastor Mana Suanboon, interview by C. R. Hillier.

frequently referred to during the interviews. It was appropriated to argue that there is a possibility of salvation for those who died without hearing about Christ. Thus Pastor Suphon affirmed: "There is a portion of scripture, in which Jesus, after he had died, descended and preached the good news to those in hell, in hope of their deliverance. I have that hope in me, that those people would have a chance to experience what we do."¹³⁹ Five interviewees (17 percent) remarked that they themselves would like to be able to go and speak with their deceased relatives about their Christian faith in order that their relatives might have the opportunity to respond. Riab, talking about his own family, commented: "I think about my mother and my older sister, and several more people, and about the fact that I believed but they did not believe. I would like to know if I can go and witness to them."¹⁴⁰ The implication was that if he were able to go to them, and to tell them about Jesus, they would have the opportunity to respond. Their response would then open the way for them to move from their current post-death state to heaven. Riab concluded that even if he himself is not able to go and speak to them, "God is able to go to every place."¹⁴¹

3. Summary of the Research Data

The conversion experiences described by the interviewees indicate that conversion is more commonly a process than a single event: a process in which initial disinterest, even hostility, gives way to interest in, and eventually exclusive commitment to Christianity. Those who became interested were prompted by personal disillusionment with Thai Buddhism which, in the case of nine of those interviewed (30 percent), was prompted by disease. In Thai Buddhist culture people with leprosy are socially marginalized and excluded from the religious community. By contrast, Christianity afforded access into an inclusive community that provided both physical and spiritual solace. Acceptance of Christianity did not necessarily infer the rejection of Buddhism. The conversion experience commonly included a period of dual commitment to both Christianity and Buddhism. However, all the interviewees in

¹³⁹ Pastor Suphon Yoodee, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴⁰ Riab Sukkasem, interview by C. R. Hillier.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

time concluded that conversion to Christianity entailed rejecting Buddhism in favour of an exclusive commitment to Christianity. There is no doubt that the Christian community influenced their decision, though at least fifteen interviewees (50 percent) contended that rejecting Buddhism was an inevitable consequence of understanding Christianity.

The converts' rejection of Thai Buddhism first becomes apparent in their withdrawal from Thai Buddhist religious culture. Forced to offer a response in the face of their increasing alienation from Thai society, all the interviewees drew a sharp distinction between culture and religion. They argued that Christians could continue to be active members of Thai society by participating in cultural, rather than religious, aspects of that society. Disagreement over what constitutes culture, as distinct from religion, and over the appropriate response to religious aspects of Thai Buddhist culture, reveals the weakness of this response. Twenty-eight interviewees (ninety-three percent) insisted that Christian involvement in Thai Buddhist culture should be restricted to presumed non-religious, cultural, activities. Two interviewees (7 percent) were extremely critical of that position. Rev. Suttiphorn and Pastor Wicharn insisted that ACTC's withdrawal from the Buddhist community was unacceptable, inappropriate and inconsistent with ACTC's expectation that Buddhists participate in the Christian community.

The interviewees' rejection of Thai Buddhism as a religious system persuaded them not only to withdraw from Thai Buddhist religious culture, but also to conclude that Buddhism has nothing to contribute to Christianity. Only eight interviewees (27 percent) were able to suggest ways in which Thai Buddhism might contribute to Christianity. They recommended that Christians appropriate certain Thai Buddhist practices, such as meditating and alms giving. However, they distinguished between the practices that Christians might adopt and the beliefs that underpinned those practices. Their responses were consistent with their belief that religion and culture may be distinguished from one another.

Despite insisting that Buddhism and Christianity represent two mutually exclusive religious realms, and that conversion entails the rejection of Buddhism in favour of an exclusive commitment to Christianity, the interviewees' nevertheless indicated that their Buddhist heritage significantly influences their understanding and articulation of the Christian faith. Their initial perception of God was influenced by their pre-existing Thai Buddhist cosmology. In recalling their conversion many of the interviewees described a time of need during which the power of God, *phracaw*, was experienced as being greater than the traditional sources of power within Thai Buddhism. They reached this conclusion primarily through their new understanding of *phracaw* as the creator God. This suggests that conversion to Christianity involves the transfer of allegiance from traditional sources of power to a new source of power. Frequently this is marked by a vow of allegiance, typically the promise of service to God in return for a divine blessing. The Christian creator God became their 'lord.' Pastor Somchai contended that this is the point of conversion from Buddhism to Christianity: "It [conversion] is the day when you accept that God is your Lord. This is what is called 'being born again'. A correct understanding of God and salvation does not count."¹⁴² After converting to Christianity, at least some of the interviewees continued to expect *phracaw* to behave as their spiritual patron. It is apparent, however, that post-conversion experiences and teaching persuaded most of the interviewees to reassess their understanding of, and manner of relating to, God. They contended that, although God may be appealed to as their spiritual patron, God is neither capricious nor open to manipulation in the same way as other traditional sources of power.

The traditional sources of power were not renounced after conversion to Christianity but instead reinterpreted in relation to *phracaw*. This is in accord with Hiltunen who argues:

Just because Christians burn the paraphernalia of animistic (*sic*) religiosity and stop involving themselves in animistic (*sic*) practices doesn't mean they cease

¹⁴² Pastor Somchai Phromthaisong, interview by C. R. Hillier.

to live in a world inhabited by spirits. It's just that their relationship to that world changes as does their interpretation of it.¹⁴³

The interviewees believed that the spirits of Thai Buddhism were evil, in league with Satan and in opposition to God. They contended that, as Christians, *phracaw* protects them from the ill effects of these malicious and marauding spirits. Significantly, they were unable to distinguish between Thai Buddhism and popular Thai beliefs and practices related to spirits. Their assessment of the spirits as universally 'evil' and the contention that Thai Buddhism was inescapably entangled with these same spirits critically influenced their evaluation of Thai Buddhism.

Popular Buddhist beliefs about sin significantly influenced the interviewees' understanding of the Christian concept of sin and, consequently the manner in which they identified themselves as sinners. At the point of conversion the interviewees had a Buddhist understanding of sin. They believed that sin referred to particular actions that had inevitable consequences, according to the law of *kamma*. Those who were unwell believed that their ill-health was a direct result of their sin. They were afraid of the negative consequences of their adverse fate, in particular going to hell. Christianity reinforced these beliefs about sin but offered an alternative solution. The promise of salvation from sin was a significant factor in their conversion to Christianity. By contrast, those who were well believed that their health was a direct result of their sinlessness and accumulation of merit. Consequently the Christian teaching about sin did not resonate with them and they did not consider it to be a significant factor in their conversion.

After conversion to Christianity both the unwell and the well began to re-evaluate their initial understanding of sin. In the process novel ideas about sin were assimilated into Thai Christianity. Converts accepted the Christian belief that sin is intrinsic to human nature, causing a disruption of the human relationship with God. However, they understood these ideas within their Thai Buddhist context, and drew on both Buddhist and Christian sources in their attempts to articulate their

¹⁴³ Pekka Yrjana Hiltunen, *Light in the Shade: A Christian Encounter with Popular Buddhism in Thailand* (Bangkok: Lutheran Institute of Theological Education, 1999), 11.

understanding of sin. Revealing the influence of Christian concepts, they contended that moral absolutes originate with, and reside in, a personal spiritual being rather than an impersonal law of nature. Under the influence of Buddhist sources, they argued for the existence of an ideal moral state within which good should be rewarded with good and evil with evil. The Buddhist affirmation of an ideal moral state therefore appears to be becoming assimilated into Thai Christianity. Riab's interpretation of sin in relation to desire, and Pastor Prasit's contention that Buddhism as well as Christianity affirm the inherent sinfulness of the human heart, also indicate the influence of Buddhist ideas. Their comments represent an ambitious attempt to move beyond two mutually exclusive religious realms in a willingness to explore ways in which the two religions may relate to one another.

A deepening appreciation of the Christian doctrine of sin persuaded four interviewees (13 percent) that the term *weenkam* would be more appropriate than *baab* to express their understanding. Five more interviewees (17 percent) said that they would use the term *weenkam* to explain the Christian understanding of sin to a Buddhist, but would be uncomfortable adopting that term in the Christian community. Fifteen interviewees (50 percent), however, were unwilling, even openly critical, of the Christian use of this term, insisting that it had Buddhist connotations that were inconsistent with the Christian faith.

During the process of conversion from Buddhism to Christianity the interviewees gave evidence of having jettisoned aspects of the Buddhist understanding of salvation, particularly the belief that salvation can be achieved by one's self. Instead they accepted aspects of the Christian understanding of salvation, particularly the belief that salvation is dependent on Jesus Christ as Saviour. Fourteen interviewees (47 percent) articulated their understanding of how Christ mediates salvation by using Buddhist terms and concepts. They contended that Christ is the one who releases from *weenkam*, by negating its adverse effects, and making merit for others. In the process of assimilating an alternative Christian soteriology, and endeavouring to articulate it within a Buddhist context, the interviewees engaged in some depth with the Buddhist doctrine of merit. Their critique of the Buddhist understanding of

merit persuaded them to begin to develop a Christian doctrine of *tham bun* that draws on both Buddhist and Christian sources. This reflects their belief that Christians do good, not in order to receive the benefits of *tham bun*, but because they understand themselves already to have received the grace and mercy of God. In expounding this idea the interviewees were eager to refute the view that salvation by faith infers that Christians no longer need do good. But *tham bun* is now enabled by the power of God, rather than being an effect of their own strength.

An analysis of the interviewees' understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Thai Buddhism, in particular their understanding of the relationship between the presence and salvific grace of God, and their Thai Buddhist heritage, is revealing. The evidence suggests that although many of the interviewees were keen to explore a general relationship between the presence and grace of God and Thai Buddhist culture, they are not willing to expound on a specific relationship between the presence and grace of God and Thai Buddhism. Six interviewees (20 percent) identified the presence of God in their Thai Buddhist heritage with what Thai religious thinking describes as 'all the sacred things in the universe.' Four interviewees (13 percent) surmised that the human conscience indicates the presence of God in their Thai Buddhist heritage. One interviewee (3 percent) suggested that the human desire for the Transcendent indicates the presence of God. All eleven of these interviewees (37 percent) argued that Thai Buddhists have an innate knowledge of God. Six (20 percent) argued that an innate knowledge of God is derived from nature, four (13 percent) that it derives from conscience or morality, and one (3 percent) that it comes from inner longing. All inferred that an innate knowledge of God is theistically significant because it is revealed by God and received as men and women respond to God.

Although thirteen interviewees (43 percent) argued that God is present in Buddhist culture, none was willing to affirm that the presence of God could be related to the Buddhist religion. Only one interviewee tentatively proposed that God might have 'used' Buddhism. This indicates that, while many of the interviewees were eager to contend that God is present in their Thai Buddhist heritage, they were unable to

understand how that presence of God might be related to Thai Buddhism. Similarly, although twenty interviewees (67 percent) argued that God's salvific grace is manifest in Thai Buddhism, mediated in response to men's and women's search for God, faith in God, and obedience to their God-given conscience, they were unwilling to explore how Thai Buddhism related to that search. The interviewees who discussed how God's salvific might be mediated to individuals after death inferred that, in life, Thai Buddhism had been ineffective in securing salvation. Many interviewees were unwilling to explore either how God may have been present in their Buddhist history, or how God's salvific grace may have been mediated to Thai Buddhists. Seventeen interviewees (57 percent) did not believe that God was present in Thai Buddhist culture and ten interviewees (34 percent) did not believe that God's salvific grace could be mediated to Thai Buddhists.

It is evident that the interviewees' negative assessment of Thai Buddhism prevents them from exploring a relationship between the presence and purposes of God in Christianity and Thai Buddhism. Consequently the interviewees either denied that God is present and able to save in Thai Buddhist history, or they contended that the presence and saving grace of God in Thai Buddhist culture is unrelated to Thai Buddhism. Hence, their rejection of Thai Buddhism prevents them from engaging in an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. The absence of an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity means that they were powerless to address a number of critical questions raised by the contention that God is present and active in Thai Buddhist culture. In particular they were unable to explore the relationship between implicit faith in God, as a Buddhist, and explicit faith in God, as a Christian. Neither were they able to expound on how implicit faith may be expressed within Thai Buddhism.

Conclusion to Part Three

1. A Comparison of the CCT and ACTC Interviewees'

Understanding of Thai Culture and Thai Religion

All the interviewees, both those from CCT and from ACTC, distinguished between Thai culture and Thai religion.¹ While all were willing to affirm and embrace Thai culture they offered a range of different responses to Thai religion. The majority explicitly rejected Thai religion, while implicitly accepting and appropriating significant aspects of Thai religion. A minority, from both CCT and ACTC, were willing to engage in an explicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism that resulted in their conscious appropriation of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices.

The interviewees were united in their affirmation of Thai culture. They insisted that Thai Christians could participate in, and appropriate, beliefs and practices deemed to be cultural. They argued that such beliefs and practices included both neutral and positive aspects of Thai society that could be distinguished from, and were uncontaminated by, Thai religion. Thus Thai music, dance and drama were deemed to be cultural, distinct from religious, and widely accepted by both CCT and ACTC churches.² However, disagreement about what was cultural and what religious gave rise to a range of opinions about which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture Thai Christians could participate in and appropriate into Thai Christianity. On the whole the CCT Christians interviewed presented a more diverse spectrum of opinions about which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture were cultural and which religious while the ACTC interviewees' offered a more unanimous, although restricted, understanding of what constituted culture and what religion. For example, CCT interviewees were more likely to stress the importance of participating in and contributing to the inter-religious community, an attitude which persuaded them that Christians should *wai* the Buddhist monks, attend the temple, listen to the teaching and meditate alongside

¹ See Chapter Seven, 2., B., "Christian Involvement in Thai Buddhist Culture" and Chapter Eight, 2., B., "Religion and Culture."

² Ibid.

their Buddhist neighbours. These practices were either interpreted as cultural, and thus permissible for Christians to participate in, or deemed religious and reinterpreted in accordance with the Christian faith.³ The majority of the ACTC interviewees, on the other hand, were only willing to condone Christian involvement in activities such as preparing food and taking photos, activities which they presumed to be cultural, and thus religiously neutral, aspects of Thai Buddhist society.⁴ Thus the distinction between culture and religion, and definitions of culture and religion accepted by the CCT and ACTC interviewees, enabled CCT Christians to participate in and appropriate a diverse range of beliefs and practices common to Thai society but restricted that which ACTC Christians could embrace.

The majority of interviewees explicitly rejected Thai religion and thus Thai Buddhism.⁵ Although the CCT interviewees were more positive about Thai Buddhism than their Thai Christian ancestors and the ACTC interviewees they still insisted that conversion to Christianity entailed a rejection of Buddhism. In particular every first-generation CCT Christian interviewed admitted that their conversion to Christianity involved jettisoning Buddhism.⁶ The ACTC interviewees emphatically insisted that Christianity was complete without Buddhism and superior to Buddhism, the majority rejecting any suggestion that Christians could participate in Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices or that Thai Buddhism might contribute to Thai Christianity.⁷ The CCT and ACTC interviewees' rejection of Thai Buddhism included both fundamental Buddhist beliefs, that Shorter identifies with the cognitive and/or symbolic level of culture, and Buddhist rituals, that Shorter identifies with the phenomenological level of culture.

Although the majority of interviewees explicitly rejected Thai Buddhism, insisting that Thai Christians could not participate in Thai Buddhist religious culture or

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See Chapter Seven, 2., A., "A Christian Heritage and Theological Education."

⁷ See Chapter Eight, 2., C., "Rejection of Thai Buddhism as a Religious System."

appropriate aspects of Thai Buddhism into Thai Christianity, a minority of interviewees from both CCT and ACTC expressed a more positive approach toward Thai Buddhist religious culture. Those who adopted a more dialogical approach to Thai Buddhism argued that some Thai Buddhist practices could be reinterpreted, in order that Thai Christians might participate more fully in Thai Buddhist religious culture, while others could be appropriated by Thai Christians, in order to render Thai Christianity more authentically Thai. For example, Rev. Dr. Pradit, from CCT, argued that Christians should offer rice to the Buddhist monks insisting that Christians give the Buddhist practice a Christian interpretation: "I would be happy to give and *wai* out of respect, because he is worthy of respect. He is an elderly man who has lived an honest life. He has not harmed anyone and is concentrating on a better life. So I *wai* him, but not because he is the way to heaven."⁸ Similarly Pastor Somsak, from ACTC, remarked that it would be good if "the Buddhist practice of giving was carried over by Christians in the giving of themselves and their resources to God."⁹ Thus they argued that Thai Christians may accept Buddhist rituals, that Shorter identifies with the phenomenological level of culture, by offering a reinterpretation of the underlying meaning of those rituals, that Shorter identifies with the symbolic or cognitive level of culture.

A few interviewees were willing to openly appropriate Thai Buddhist beliefs that Shorter identifies with the cognitive level of culture. Such instances of an explicit appropriation of Thai Buddhist beliefs were, however, rare. They include, for example, Rev. Dr. Pradit's acceptance of the Buddhist teaching about the Law of *Kamma*, whereby he insists that for Christians, as much as for Buddhists, good actions will be rewarded with good, evil with evil: "If you do the right thing the result

⁸ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean. See Chapter Seven, 2., B., "Christian Involvement in Thai Buddhist Culture."

⁹ Pastor Somsak Phongthannakorn, interview by C. R. Hillier. See Chapter Eight, 2., C., "Rejection of Thai Buddhism as a Religious System."

should be good, if you do the wrong thing the result will be bad. That is very reasonable. Kam should be interpreted in that way.”¹⁰

The interviewees’ explicit rejection of Thai religion, and thus Thai Buddhism, was inconsistent with their implicit acceptance of Thai Buddhism. An analysis of the interviewees’ articulation of their Christian beliefs, and response to specific questions concerning the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism, reveals that most if not all the interviewees are engaged in an implicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism that entails their acceptance of some Thai Buddhist beliefs. For example, the interviewees’ understanding of God, *phracaw*, and the spirit world reveals an acceptance of Thai Buddhist cosmology. *Phracaw* is understood and related to as a spirit of immense power and the spirits of Thai Buddhism reinterpreted in relation to *phracaw*. Specific questions, intended to disclose the interviewees’ understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity, reveal that most interviewees, from both CCT and ACTC, believe that God is present in Thai Buddhist culture and able to save Thai Buddhists. The principal distinction between the two groups of interviewees, CCT and ACTC, being that while some CCT interviewees were willing to explore the relationship between God’s presence and saving power and Thai Buddhism the ACTC interviewees were not.

2. The Relationship Between the Interviewees and their Three Religious Heritages: Thai Christian Heritage, Thai Buddhist Heritage and Missionary Heritage

The evidence suggests that both groups of interviewees are in dialogue with their three religious heritages: the Thai Christian heritage, the Thai Buddhist heritage, and the missionary heritage. In some cases the dialogue consists of an open verbal interchange of ideas and may be described as an explicit dialogue. In other cases the dialogue consists of an instinctive response to different ideas, whereby the recipient

¹⁰ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit, interview by Patricia McLean. See Chapter Seven, 2., D., 7., “The Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Religious Culture.”

involved seeks to interpret the new ideas in terms of the old. The complex interchange of ideas that results is not verbalised as such, but may be observed as an individual articulates an understanding that emerges out of that exchange. This may be described as an implicit dialogue. In some cases the dialogue has been carrying on for some time and is currently in full swing, while in others the dialogue has only just begun.

In the case of the CCT interviewees the Christian heritage reaches back to the beginning of the Christian movement in North Thailand during the nineteenth century. Thus CCT's missionary heritage is primarily concerned with the American Presbyterians, although it also includes a number of organisations that now work in association with CCT. In the case of the ACTC interviewees the Christian heritage stems from the birth of OMF founded churches in Central Thailand during the 1950s. Thus ACTC's missionary heritage is restricted to OMF. Both groups of interviewees share the same Thai Buddhist heritage, however, their relationship with that heritage differs. The CCT interviewees, being primarily second and third-generation Christians, stand at some distance from that Thai Buddhist heritage. The ACTC interviewees, on the other hand, being primarily first-generation Christians, are in close proximity to their Thai Buddhist heritage.

A. The Thai Christian Heritage

The interviewees' relationship to their heritages critically influences the dialogue they have with their heritages. The CCT interviewees' chronological distance from the origins of their Christian heritage meant that it was easier for them to distinguish between their own articulation of Christianity and that of their Christian ancestors. They distinguish between their received Christian heritage, a product of the inculturation of Christianity by first-generation Christians in the nineteenth century, and their own contemporary inculturation of Christianity in Thailand in the late twentieth century. They have accepted some aspects of their Thai Christian heritage, albeit unconsciously, such as the understanding of *phracaw* as spiritual patron and the manner of relating to God by means of a vow, while rejecting others. In particular they have explicitly rejected the negative appraisal of Thai Buddhist culture that characterised Thai Christianity during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and

have begun to reassess Christian doctrine on the basis of a more positive assessment of Thai Buddhist culture. For example, they critique the received Christian doctrine of sin, contending that it entails an unwarranted negative assessment of Thai Buddhist culture, and offer instead a doctrine of sin that is sympathetic towards Thai Buddhist culture. Thus Rev. Mana criticised his grandparents' portrayal of the Christian doctrine of sin insisting that they "were too concerned about God judging and punishing all the time. I was afraid of God. I was afraid God would punish me if I told a lie, or stole something."¹¹ He concluded: "My grandparents had good intentions, but the way they communicated gave us a wrong understanding of God."¹²

By contrast, the ACTC interviewees' proximity to their Christian roots meant that it was more difficult for them to distinguish between their own articulation of Christianity and their Thai Christian heritage, and to initiate dialogue with that heritage. For the most part the ACTC interviewees did not distinguish between their own articulation of Christianity and that of the church to which they belonged. The only indication of the presence of a dialogue between the ACTC interviewees and their Christian heritage occurs in Rev. Sutti-phorn's and Pastor Wicharn's interviews. Both these interviewees openly critiqued ACTC's stance towards culture and religion. They argued that ACTC is isolating itself from Thai Buddhist culture in a way that is inappropriate and unacceptable for Christians, and which is inconsistent with the ACTC Christians' expectations that Buddhists participate in Thai Christian society.¹³ Given that Rev. Sutti-phorn was a third-generation Christian originally from CCT, a stance that no doubt influenced his critique of ACTC, Pastor Wicharn was the only interviewee, originating from the ACTC, who explicitly challenged the ACTC's approach to Thai Buddhist culture.

¹¹ Rev. Mana Duangsuwan, interview by C. R. Hillier. See Chapter Seven, 2., D., 4., "Sin."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See Chapter Eight, 2., B., "Religion and Culture."

B. The Thai Buddhist Heritage

The CCT interviewees' more positive appraisal of Thai Buddhism, facilitated by their detachment from the Thai Buddhist heritage as second and third-generation Christians and their post-Second World War missionary heritage, contributed to the emergence of both an implicit *and* explicit dialogue with their Buddhist heritage. An analysis of the CCT interviewees' Christian beliefs reveals that all the interviewees are engaged in an implicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism as they endeavour to interpret and explain their Christian faith from within the Thai Buddhist context. The evidence demonstrates that the major cosmological themes associated with Buddhism – *kamma*, merit and spiritual patronage – critically influence the interviewees understanding of Christianity.¹⁴ An analysis of the CCT interviewees' understanding of religion and culture, and their responses to specific questions concerning the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture and saving grace of God administered to Thai Buddhists, reveals that a significant minority of CCT interviewees are engaged in an explicit dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage. They are exploring ways in which Thai Christians may be involved in Thai Buddhist religious culture and beginning to suggest aspects of Thai Buddhist religious culture that may be incorporated into Thai Christianity.¹⁵ Having insisted that God is present in Thai Buddhist culture, and able to save Thai Buddhists, they are endeavouring to understand how God's presence and saving power relates to Thai Buddhism.¹⁶

By contrast, the ACTC interviewees' explicit rejection of Buddhism as a religious system, arising from their personal rejection of Thai Buddhism and influenced by their missionary heritage, restricted the emergence of a Christian-Buddhist dialogue within ACTC. However, although the ACTC interviewees' negative appraisal of Thai Buddhism prevented them from engaging in an explicit dialogue with Thai Buddhists, they do engage in an extensive implicit dialogue with their Thai Buddhist

¹⁴ See Chapter Seven, 2., D., "Articulation of Christian Beliefs."

¹⁵ See Chapter Seven, 2., B., "Christian Involvement in Thai Buddhist Culture" and C., "Thai Buddhism's Contribution to Thai Christianity."

¹⁶ See Chapter Seven, 2., D., 7., "The Presence of God in Thai Buddhist Religious Culture" and 8., "Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?"

heritage. This is amply illustrated in their articulation of their Christian beliefs, the research data demonstrating that, like the CCT interviewees, the major cosmological themes associated with Buddhism - *kamma*, merit and spiritual patronage - critically influence the interviewees' understanding of Christianity.¹⁷ This suggests that the ACTC interviewees are endeavouring to understand and to express their Christian faith through an engagement with Buddhist ideas in a way that they are unwilling to acknowledge openly. There is some evidence to suggest that the ACTC interviewees' implicit dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage is more intense than that of the CCT interviewees. For instance the ACTC interviewees are more likely than their CCT counterparts to draw upon Thai Buddhist terms and concepts in order to understand and articulate their Christian faith. Thus, it was only the ACTC interviewees who drew upon the popular Thai Buddhist understanding of the post-death state to explore how Buddhists without an explicit knowledge of Christ might be saved.¹⁸ The ACTC interviewees' status as first-generation Christians, extensive personal experience of Thai Buddhism and thus proximity to their Thai Buddhist heritage may have contributed to the intensity of their dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage.

C. The Missionary Heritage

The CCT interviewees' independence from the American Presbyterian missionaries facilitates their dialogue with their post-war mission heritage. They are in dialogue with post-war Christian theology represented by American Presbyterian missionaries who were themselves developing a new approach to Thai Buddhist religious culture. It is evident from the interviews that most, if not all, of the Christians in CCT have been made aware of these new ideas. There are some, like Rev. Prakai, who are in favour of a more open attitude to Thai Buddhist religious culture. They argue that the more dialogical approach to Thai Buddhism has begun to break down the wall between Buddhism and Christianity.¹⁹ They contend that it is removing mutual fear and antipathy, and moving towards better relationships. There are others, however,

¹⁷ See Chapter Eight, 2., D., "Articulation of Christian Beliefs."

¹⁸ See Chapter Eight, 2., D., 8., "Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?"

¹⁹ See Chapter Seven, 2., A., "A Christian Heritage and Theological Education."

who are less favourable to this more open attitude to Thai Buddhism.²⁰ They argue that introducing new teaching about Thai Buddhism, and encouraging the church to engage in inter-religious dialogue, has the effect of weakening the church. They point out that many Christians are neither sufficiently conversant with their own faith, nor secure enough in their own religious identity, to begin dialoguing with those of another faith and another religious tradition.

By contrast, the ACTC interviewees' proximity to their missionary heritage makes it difficult for them to engage in an explicit dialogue with the missionaries. There is little evidence that the ACTC interviewees have distinguished between their own articulation of Christianity and that of the OMF missionaries. The only explicit distinction evidenced by the research data relates to the question of whether Thai Buddhists may be saved. Teng contended that OMF missionaries were unwilling to respond to the question, or that their only response was negative.²¹ Significantly, twenty ACTC interviewees (67 percent) argued that it is possible for Thai Buddhists to be saved without an explicit knowledge of Christ, and more importantly went on to expand how that might be possible. Although the interviewees did not openly admit that their own understanding of salvation represented a break with mission theology, this appears to be the case.

3. The American Presbyterians' and Overseas Missionary Fellowship Missionaries' Influence on the Interviewees' Inculturation of Christianity

The evidence suggests that missionaries have had some influence on the approach that Thai Christians have taken toward Thai Buddhist culture, the dialogue that has developed between Christianity and Buddhism and the emergence of Thai Christianity. However, the evidence also indicates that that influence is essentially limited. This is true of both American Presbyterian and OMF missionaries.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Teng Prasert, interview by Patricia McLean. See Chapter Eight, 2., D., 8., "Can Thai Buddhists be Saved?"

The American Presbyterians' adopted a more positive open approach towards Thai Buddhism after the Second World War and encouraged Thai Christians in CCT do the same. Consequently, CCT Christians were increasingly willing to listen to Thai Buddhists, learn about Thai Buddhism and explore the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. Thus the American Presbyterians contributed to the emergence of an explicit dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, Christianity and Buddhism, within CCT. However, CCT Christians have not accepted uncritically the American Presbyterians' approach to Thai Buddhism. Instead they are developing their own indigenous response to the American Presbyterians stance and their own approach to Thai Buddhism and Thai Buddhist culture. In particular they have rejected Seely's and Butt's theology of religions which they deem to be unorthodox and inappropriate to the Thai context. Thus although the American Presbyterians' have been able to encourage a more dialogical approach toward Thai Buddhist culture than that which characterised CCT before the Second World War, they have not been able to dictate attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture or the inculturation of Christianity in CCT.

By contrast, the OMF missionaries' emphatic rejection of Thai Buddhist culture severely restricted the emergence of an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity within the ACTC. Most ACTC Christians interviewed were unwilling to listen to Thai Buddhist, learn about Thai Buddhism or explore the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. However, an analysis of the ACTC interviewees' articulation of their Christian beliefs indicates that despite an explicit rejection of Thai Buddhism, and the absence of an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, Thai Christians in ACTC are engaged in an implicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism that involves an acceptance of some Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices. Thus while OMF missionaries have until now prevented the emergence of an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity they have not been able to silence the implicit dialogue that is occurring as Thai Christians endeavour to interpret their Christian faith in the Thai Buddhist context. The evidence emerging from the interviews is that Thai Christians within ACTC are

developing their own approach to Thai Buddhist culture that is distinct from and independent of OMF missionaries.

4. An Analysis of the Interviewees' Inculturation of Christianity in Relation to Bevans' Five Models of Contextualisation

The interviewees' dialogical approach to Thai Buddhist culture, whether explicit or implicit, implies a rejection of the translation model, appropriated by OMF, and an acceptance and utilisation of the Bevans' synthetic model of culture, appropriated by the American Presbyterians. Despite the interviewees' insistence that culture may be distinguished from religion, and the majority's rejection of Thai religion, Thai Christians are in dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage. The presence of a Christian-Buddhist dialogue, whether explicit and/or implicit indicates the interviewees' belief that God is revealed in and through particular cultures and that therefore it is legitimate to appropriate aspects of that culture and religion in the process of inculturating Christianity in that culture, a theological presupposition that Bevans associates with the synthetic model of contextualisation.

An analysis of Thai Christianity proposes an elaboration of Bevans' synthetic model of contextualisation, Thai Christianity elucidating the interaction occurring between cultures during the process of inculturation. First, the evidence suggests that the interaction between the two cultures ranges in intensity, the intensity of the dialogue corresponding to the individual's proximity to the culture. While any individual must be able to distinguish between their own culture and another culture in order to dialogue with that culture, once that distinction has been made it appears the intensity of the dialogue corresponds to one's proximity to that culture. The closer the individual to the culture, the more intense the dialogue, whereas the greater the distance between the individual and the culture, the more superficial the dialogue. Thus the interviewees with extensive personal experience of Buddhism were engaged in a more intense dialogue with Buddhism than those who lacked any personal experience of Buddhism. Second, the evidence suggests that the interaction between the two cultures may involve, either, an explicit or an implicit dialogue, the

nature of the dialogue corresponding to the individual's attitude to the culture. A strongly negative attitude towards a culture encouraging an implicit dialogue between the cultures, while a more positive attitude permitting an explicit dialogue between the cultures. Third, the evidence suggests that the process of inculturation may involve the interaction of more than two cultures. The process of inculturation reflected in the interviews requires interviewees to engage with at least three other cultures: Thai Christianity, Thai Buddhism, and post-war mission theology. This reflects the interviewees' three distinct heritages: the Thai Christian heritage, the Thai Buddhist heritage and the missionary heritage. Thai Christianity emerges from the Thai Christians' dialogue with these three heritages. The dialogue varies in intensity and ranges from explicit to implicit, depending on the interviewees' proximity to, and attitude towards, the three heritages. Finally, the evidence suggests that the inculturation process gives rise to an innovative culture that, while standing in continuity with its heritages, is a replica of none. Thus Thai Christianity, articulated by the interviewees, is distinct from the Christian heritage, Buddhist heritage and missionary heritage.

Chapter Nine: The Significance of Thai Protestant Christianity

1. Introduction

This chapter will draw out the principal findings of the research. It will reflect on those findings in such a way that speaks to the identity of Thai Protestant Christianity, elucidating the implications of the research for our understanding of Thai Protestant Christianity.

2. The Changing Face of Thai Buddhist Society

Theravada Buddhism has been a vital ingredient in Thai society since the founding of the first Tai kingdoms in Southeast Asia during the 13th and 14th centuries. First Chiangmai, Sukhothai and Ayuthaya, and later Thonburi-Bangkok under the new Chakri Dynasty, were established as Theravada Buddhist kingdoms. In the crucible of Thai society Theravada Buddhism gained a distinctive character. Traditional Thai religious beliefs and practices and innovative Theravada Buddhist beliefs and practices existed alongside one another, influencing one another and contributing to the emergence of a complex synthesis. The emergent Thai Buddhism was therefore distinct from classical Theravada Buddhism, having incorporated many non-Buddhist elements from traditional Thai religion. Thai Buddhism gradually infiltrated all areas of Thai society, influencing social, cultural, political and economic life. The Buddhist monastery became the centre of community life. Schooling, social functions, political activities and economic development projects were orchestrated by the local village monks. The Buddhist *Sangha* became pivotal to the life of the nation. An intimate relationship evolved between *Sangha* and king in which the *Sangha* legitimated the power of the king and the king protected the *Sangha*. Thai culture, by which is meant the totality of beliefs, values and knowledge that constitute the basis of Thai society, was permeated by Thai Buddhism.

Like all cultures, however, Thai Buddhist culture, is not static but constantly evolving. The encroachment of the European powers during the nineteenth century

served as an additional impetus for change. Social, cultural, political, economic and religious reforms were instigated by King Mongkut in an endeavour to maintain national independence, promote a distinct Thai identity, and ensure the ongoing centrality of Theravada Buddhism. Rapid change continued unabated throughout the twentieth century. In 1932 the nation made the transition from an absolute to constitutional monarchy, initiating a prolonged struggle for democratic government. Political tension was compounded by the nation's proximity to the geo-political centre of communism and its intimate relationship with the USA during the Vietnam War. The industrial age in Thailand started after the Second World War with massive investment in the infrastructure and industry of the nation. The country made the transition from a subsistence economy, primarily agricultural in nature, to a more diversified economy with a future-orientated basis.¹ By the mid 1990's Thailand had become one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Economic change went hand in hand with massive social change. Traditional rural communities were depleted by the accelerated migration toward the urban centres. Village life was deprived of the young and the able. In the cities wealth was concentrated in the hands of comparatively few, while the majority were poor, dispossessed, slum-dwellers.

New religious movements arose in response to the changing face of Thai Buddhist society. Three Thai Buddhist reform movements have risen to national prominence: the *Suan Mokkh*, founded by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Dammakaya* by Chaiboon Sutipol and *Santi Asoke* by Bodhiraksa. While Buddhadasa and Chaiboon, sought to reform Thai Buddhism from within the *Sangha*, Bodhiraksa believed that it was necessary to initiate reform independently of the *Sangha*. The *Suan Mokkh* and *Santi Asoke* movements spoke out against the perceived social, political and economic injustices inherent in modern Thailand. They insisted that Theravada Buddhism contradicted the rampant materialism of modern Thai society and offered an alternative way of life. The *Dammakaya* movement, on the other hand, sought to marry popular materialistic aspirations with Thai Buddhism.

¹ Wolf Donner, *The Five Faces of Thailand: An Economic Geography*, A Publication of The Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg (London, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 1978), 66-77.

3. Christian Mission: The American Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship

This complex, constantly evolving Thai Buddhist milieu is the context within which Christian mission history has been played out. This thesis has looked at 160 years of this history, from the arrival of the first APM missionaries in 1840 to the close of the twentieth century. It has focused on two very different kinds of mission: APM and OMF. Both missions brought clear understandings of evangelism and mission-church relations.

A. APM's and OMF's Understanding of Evangelism and Mission-Church Relations

APM understood mission to be ecclesiological in nature. APM was an extension of PCUSA in Thailand and worked alongside the indigenous Thai church, CCT. APM's understanding of the relationship between mission and church inferred a close relationship between mission and church, between foreign missionaries and Thai Christians. This led to a close engagement between the foreign missionaries and the Thai people and Thai Buddhist society. Throughout the twentieth century APM became increasingly convinced that it was inappropriate for PCUSA to exist independently of CCT in Thailand. They believed that it was imperative to integrate representatives of PCUSA, working in Thailand, into the national church. To this end the APM created the CCT in 1932, and following the Second World War integrated APM missionaries within CCT to work alongside Thai Christians and under the authority of the indigenous Thai church.

OMF deliberately set itself up as a para-church organisation. It was independent of 'sending' churches in the West and 'receiving' churches in Thailand. OMF's understanding of the relationship between mission and church enforced a clear demarcation line between mission and church, and thus between foreign missionaries and Thai Christians. OMF inherited principles and practices from CIM that should have safeguarded the independence of the indigenous Thai church, and promoted positive relationships between OMF missionaries and Thai Christians. These principles, however, were abandoned by OMF in Thailand when it became apparent

that there was no indigenous Thai church with which OMF was willing to work. Instead of mission and church working alongside one another, as had been the case in China with CIM and the indigenous Chinese church, OMF dominated a small nucleus of indigenous Thai Christians. The evolution of OMF's understanding of mission-church relations in Thailand reinforced the demarcation between mission and church, ensured the dominance of the mission over the church and encouraged foreign missionaries to keep a distance between themselves and the Thai people and Thai Buddhist society.

This thesis has shown that APM and OMF articulated different understandings of evangelism. APM cultivated a holistic understanding of evangelism, maintaining that it embraced both the explicit proclamation of the Gospel and implicit embodiment of the Gospel in the life of the church. APM developed an interdependent relationship between evangelism and the life of the church. Thai Buddhists converting to Christianity were readily incorporated into the church. OMF, on the other hand, insisted that the term evangelism denotes the explicit proclamation of the Gospel. Other Christian ministries, such as medical work, were subordinated to, and considered to serve the interests of, the explicit proclamation of the Gospel. OMF's failure adequately to relate the practice of evangelism to the life of the church contributed to their failure to develop an adequate ecclesiology. OMF consistently prioritised the conversion of individuals without promoting the development of a strong independent Thai church. Recently it has begun to rectify that situation, encouraging the emergence of a distinct Thai church. However, the mission still retains control over the church.

B. APM's and OMF's Approach to Thai Buddhist Culture and Thai Buddhism

This thesis has argued that APM's and OMF's understanding of mission, particularly their understanding of mission-church relations, influenced their attitudes toward Thai culture and Thai Buddhism. APM's close relationship with CCT fostered close relationships between foreign missionaries and Thai Christians, encouraging foreign missionaries to engage with Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. A new approach to mission-church relations after the Second World War went hand in hand

with a new approach toward Thai culture and Thai Buddhism. APM missionaries became increasingly sympathetic towards Thai culture and Thai Buddhism. They encouraged Thai Christians to participate more fully in Thai Buddhist culture by becoming involved in the life of the Thai Buddhist community: for example, by joining in, and contributing to annual Thai festivals such as Songkran. They insisted that cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society, such as Thai art, drama, dance and music, should be incorporated into Thai Christianity. APM missionaries also began to consider ways in which Thai Christians could participate in Thai Buddhist religious culture, and were open to incorporating religious aspects of Thai Buddhist society, such as religious rituals and ceremonies, into Thai Christianity. A minority of APM missionaries proposed a more far-reaching approach. Seely and Butt argued that God was revealed as fully in Buddhism as in Christianity, and that both religions offered their followers a means of attaining salvation. While the majority of APM missionaries did not embrace Seely's and Butt's pluralist approach to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism, they have been willing to engage in dialogue with Thai Buddhists. This dialogical approach to Thai culture and Thai Buddhism has facilitated the inculturation of the CCT in Thailand, and represents what Bevans has identified as the synthetic model of inculturation that understands inculturation to involve a transformative interaction between Christianity and Thai Buddhist society.

OMF's independent stance in relation to ACTC made it difficult for foreign missionaries and Thai Christians to establish close relationships with one another, or for foreign missionaries to engage with Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. This thesis has argued that OMF's insistence on maintaining its independent status as a para-church organisation and its ongoing domination of the indigenous Thai church, reflect an ambiguous attitude toward Thai culture and negative attitude toward Thai Buddhism. OMF insisted that conversion to Christianity necessitated a transition from the Thai Buddhist community to the Thai Christian community. It argued that after conversion Thai Christians could participate in cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society, but should have nothing to do with religious beliefs and practices. It contended that Christianity and Buddhism were incompatible, and that Thai Buddhism had nothing to contribute to Thai Christianity. OMF's gradual

appreciation of certain aspects of Thai Buddhist culture has opened the missionaries to a cultural dialogue, but they insist that this should be confined to what they consider to be cultural, as distinct from religious, elements of Thai Buddhist culture. OMF continues to be unwilling to dialogue with what it considers to be the religious elements of Thai culture or with Thai Buddhism. Consequently OMF practices what Bevans' identifies as a translation model of inculturation, maintaining that Christianity should be inculturated within Thai culture without reference to Thai religion.

4. The Characteristics of Thai Christianity

The work of APM and OMF resulted in the conversion of Thai Buddhists to Christianity and the emergence of a nucleus of indigenous Christians. The new converts shared a common language, culture and religious heritage that distinguished them from the foreign missionaries. In the process of inculturating Christianity within the Thai Buddhist context this thesis has demonstrated that they developed their own unique understanding and expression of Christianity. In doing so they established their own identity as Thai Christians, distinct from that of the missionaries.

A. Thai Christianity's Three Religious Heritages: Thai Buddhist Heritage, Thai Christian Heritage and Post-War Mission Theology

The research data suggests that an appropriate way of analysing Thai Christian identity is to examine it in relation to the triple heritage of Thai Christianity: the Thai Buddhist heritage, Thai Christian heritage and post-war mission theology. Dialogue is part of everyday life for Thai Christians. They dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage in order to understand their new faith and to express it in a way that is both faithful to the Christian tradition and relevant within their Thai Buddhist context. They dialogue with their Christian heritage as they critically reassess the beliefs and practices which they inherited from the past, from the missionaries and from their Christian ancestors. They dialogue with post-war mission theology in order to evaluate what is appropriate to the Thai Buddhist context.

1. The Thai Buddhist Heritage

Initially all Thai Christians shared a common Thai Buddhist heritage. All had converted from Buddhism to Christianity, and therefore had a personal experience of Buddhism and some understanding of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, there were second-generation Christians with no personal experience of Buddhism and a limited understanding of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices. Today, in areas where APM has worked for over 100 years and where CCT has long been established, there are second, third and fourth-generation Christians with no personal experience of Buddhism and little understanding of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices. By contrast, in areas where OMF works and ACTC is established, most Thai Christians are still first-generation Christians. They have been raised in Buddhist homes, regularly attended the Buddhist temple and in some cases have been ordained into the Buddhist priesthood. They have a wealth of personal experience of Buddhism and a good understanding of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices.

Despite their differing experiences and current understandings of Thai Buddhism, the evidence generated from the interviews indicates that all Thai Christians are influenced by their Thai Buddhist heritage which they have in common. First-generation Christians, introduced to Christianity as Buddhists, invariably drew on Buddhist terms and concepts as they articulated their new faith. Second and third-generation Christians received their faith from those who had already begun to interpret Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context. They inherited, albeit critically, a Thai Buddhist interpretation of Christianity. It can therefore be said that all Thai Christians are in dialogue with their Thai Buddhist heritage. CCT Christians maintain this dialogue in an explicit way, with a willingness to listen to Thai Buddhists, to learn about Thai Buddhism and explore the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. APM's positive approach to Thai Buddhism has encouraged CCT Christians to dialogue with Thai Buddhism and acted as a catalyst for dialogue. However, the CCT Christians' relative inexperience with Thai Buddhism, and limited understanding of Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices, tends to restrict the extent and intensity of the dialogue. ACTC Christians, on the other hand,

are engaged in an implicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism. They draw on Thai Buddhist terms and concepts to articulate their faith. They are not, however, in favour of an explicit dialogue with Buddhists and express an unwillingness to listen to them, to learn from them, and to explore the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. OMF's negative approach to Thai Buddhism tends to be reproduced among ACTC Christians, and results in their current antipathy toward Christian-Buddhist dialogue. It has made it extremely difficult for ACTC Christians to foster an explicit dialogue with Thai Buddhism.

2. The Thai Christian Heritage

Thai Christians are also in dialogue with their Thai Christian heritage. The research data shows that CCT Christians, more than ACTC Christians, distinguish between their own articulation of Christianity and their Christian heritage. However, although CCT Christians are openly critical of some aspects of their Christian heritage, such as its negative approach to Thai Buddhist society and doctrine of sin, they unquestioningly accept other aspects, such as its understanding of God, obedience and the spirits. ACTC Christians' proximity to their Christian heritage means that it is difficult for them to distinguish between their own articulation of Christianity, and their Christian heritage, and to initiate a self-reflexive dialogue with their Christian heritage.

3. Post-War Mission Theology

The dialogue between Thai Christianity and post-war mission theology is also more intense among CCT Christians. Their increasing independence of APM/PCUSA has made it easier for them to distinguish between their own theology and that of the American Presbyterian missionaries, and to dialogue with them. ACTC Christians' proximity to their missionary heritage has made it more difficult for them to dialogue with post-war mission theology.

B. The Thai Christian Approach to Thai Buddhist Culture and Thai Buddhism

1. An Affirmation of Thai Buddhist Culture

Despite CCT's and ACTC's different relationships with their three religious heritages Christians in both churches have expounded similar approaches to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. Although there is an ongoing debate about which aspects of Thai Buddhist culture are cultural, and which religious, all the interviewees accept the distinction between culture and religion and articulate comparable approaches to Thai culture and Thai religion. This suggests that Thai Christians in both churches express a positive affirmation of Thai culture. They explore ways in which Thai Christians can participate more fully in Thai Buddhist culture and ways in which Thai Buddhist culture can contribute to Thai Christianity. They argue that Thai Christians should participate more fully in Thai Buddhist society by taking part in community celebrations, festivals and rituals that are deemed to be cultural. They contend that cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society, such as Thai art, drama and music, should be incorporated into Thai Christianity. Their positive approach to Thai Buddhist culture is motivated by a desire to combat the isolating effects of adopting imported Christian religious practices, to affirm their membership of the Thai Buddhist community, and to establish themselves as Thai Christians distinct from foreign missionaries.

2. An Explicit Rejection of Thai Buddhism

Thai Christians in CCT and ACTC express a less positive approach towards Thai Buddhism than they do toward Thai culture. A significant minority of the interviewees, more from CCT than from ACTC, were willing to consider ways in which they could participate more fully in Thai Buddhist religious culture and ways in which religious aspects of Thai Buddhist society, such as religious rituals and ceremonies, might be incorporated into Thai Christianity. The majority, however, insisted that conversion to Christianity involves a transition from one religious community to another, and that Thai Christians are not at liberty to participate in Thai religious culture or to draw on Thai Buddhist religious culture.

3. An Implicit Acceptance of Thai Buddhism

An analysis of the interviewees' articulation of their Christian beliefs reveals an implicit acceptance of Thai Buddhist terms and concepts that runs counter to their explicit rejection of Thai Buddhism. The research identified a number of ways in which Thai Christianity is similar to Thai Buddhism, disclosing Thai Christianity's acceptance of some Thai Buddhist terms and concepts. The research also showed that the interviewees are aware of significant differences between Thai Christianity and Thai Buddhism. This suggests that Thai Christians have not accepted Thai Buddhist terms and concepts uncritically, but that the dialogue with Thai Buddhism involves a critical evaluation of Thai Buddhist theology.

a) Cosmology

The data generated from the interviews reveals significant similarities between Thai Buddhist and Thai Christian cosmologies. God, referred to by the term *phracaw*, is understood by Thai Christians to be a spirit within the Thai Buddhist cosmology. Some Thai Christians initially believed that *phracaw* was an innovation within the Thai Buddhist cosmology hitherto unknown by Thai Buddhists. Others identified *phracaw* with spirits within the Thai Buddhist cosmology already familiar to Thai Buddhists. These spirits were commonly referred to as 'all that is sacred in the universe.' Despite these different ways of identifying *phracaw*, all the interviewees agreed that *phracaw* has immense power. It was this that persuaded many Thai Buddhists to transfer their allegiance from traditional sources of power to *phracaw*. They expected that an allegiance with *phracaw*, like allegiances with other sources of power, would ensure spiritual patronage, and secure for them *phracaw*'s protection from harm and blessing. Commonly the transfer of allegiance from the traditional sources of power to *phracaw* was marked by a vow or pledge in which the individual promised to serve *phracaw* if *phracaw* acted on their behalf.

It is evident that Thai Christians accept aspects of the Thai Buddhist cosmology, notably the concept of spiritual patronage and understanding of the patron-client relationship. They have, however, rejected other aspects of the Thai Buddhist cosmology. In particular they have rejected the Thai Buddhist understanding that the spirits, and therefore *phracaw*, are capricious and open to manipulation. They insist

that *phracaw* is trustworthy and should not be manipulated by men and women in order to ensure blessing and ward off harm. Thai Christians have also re-interpreted the other spirits within the Thai Buddhist cosmology. They understand these spirits to be evil and in league with Satan.

b) Sin, Salvation and Atonement

The Thai Christian understanding of *baab* (sin) also reveals Thai Buddhist influences. Both Thai Christians and Thai Buddhists maintain that 'to sin' is to act in a way that is deemed sinful, or wrong, in accordance with a moral code. Both insist that sinful actions have an adverse effect, in this life and the next. Both understand sin to include more than those sinful actions, however; it embraces the consequences of sinful actions, and contributes to the destitute state of humanity. There are, however, significant differences between the Thai Buddhist and Thai Christian understanding of sin. Firstly, Thai Buddhists believe that moral absolutes are embodied in, and expressed by, the Law of *Kamma*. They do not attribute personhood to the Law of *Kamma*. Thai Christians, on the other hand, believe that moral absolutes are revealed by God. They believe God to be personal and capable of relating to men and women. They insist that to sin is to act against God and that sin has a detrimental effect on the relationship between men/women and God.

Secondly, Thai Buddhists do not consider human nature to be intrinsically sinful. Sin is something that a person does or does not do, rather than something that a person is. The interviewees articulated a different view of sin, however, that understands human beings to be sinful by nature. Sin is what men and women are, and is therefore manifest in what men and women do. Emphasising the sinful state of human nature as well as the sinful acts of individual men and women accentuates the corporate nature of sin. Sin is not simply individual but characterises the community. It is not simply an act of disobedience against a moral code but denotes cosmic disorder within the ethical, environmental and socio-political realms.

Thirdly, Thai Buddhists believe that the adverse effects of sinful actions are counterbalanced by the beneficial consequences of making merit. The interviewees, on the other hand, insist that it is impossible for men and women to compensate for

the sin they have committed or rectify their own sinful nature. Thai Christianity, according to this evidence, is established upon a doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. Christ atones for sin and restores the relationship between men/women and God. Atonement is described as the act of Christ releasing men and women from *baab* or *kam*, the act of Christ making merit and transferring merit to men and women, and the act of Christ releasing humans from the power of the spirits. These three models serve as a corrective to Western interpretations of the atonement, particularly the dominance of the penal substitution model developed by Anselm that has been expounded by Western missionaries.² They reject God's wrath as the main element in the atonement, emphasising rather the love and mercy of God. They maintain that deliverance is from the power of evil (spirits) and cosmic disorder (fate) rather than from an individual's sin and guilt. They reject a passive understanding of the atonement, which maintains that the atonement is entirely God's work that individuals are simply required to accept in faith. Instead they are articulating an understanding of the atonement that calls for a human response. This is expounded in the Thai Christian understanding of *tham bun*, which expresses their radical response to atonement.

c) Christology

On the evidence of the interviews, it is fair to suggest that Thai Christianity takes a functional approach to Christology. It is concerned with what Christ does and what he achieves, rather than with metaphysical questions of who Christ is. Christ is the one who rescues men and women from *weenkam* by two complementary means: he negates *weenkam*, and he makes and transfers merit. However, it is possible to infer a transition from a functional to an ontological Christology. That is, it is possible to draw some conclusions about how Thai Christians understand who Christ is on the basis of their understanding of what he has done. Firstly, because Christ is able to negate *weenkam*, he must be in some sense above the Law of *Kamma*, and have authority over it. This implies that for Thai Christians the ultimate ontological category is no longer the Law of *Kamma* but Christ. Secondly, an emphasis on merit

² For a discussion of Anselm's doctrine of the atonement see: Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ, Foundations for Faith* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981), 67-74.

accentuates the activity of Jesus and therefore his humanity. Jesus is both the Christ who has authority over the Law of *Kamma* and the man, born in Bethlehem, ministering in Palestine, crucified in Jerusalem. It may be argued, therefore, that for Thai Christians Christ is ontologically, not simply functionally, unique. Thai Christianity therefore stands in the orthodox tradition of Chalcedon affirming both the divinity and humanity of Jesus while at the same time expressing that Christology in a culturally appropriate form.³

d) *Tham Bun*

Thai Christians have adopted the Thai Buddhist understanding of *tham bun* (making merit) and have given it a Christian interpretation. The Thai Christian understanding of *tham bun* is founded on a reinterpretation of the Law of *Kamma*. The interviewees affirmed a belief in an ideal moral state in which good is rewarded with good and evil with evil. They understand themselves to be subject to the Law of *Kamma*, receiving the appropriate consequences for their actions. They also understand themselves to have received the free gift of grace for salvation. They exhibit little sense of tension, however, between divine grace of salvation, mediated through Christ, and human free will that prompts both moral and immoral acts and their inevitable consequences. Divine grace and human free will are understood to be in an unequal but essential partnership in which pre-eminence is given to grace. Grace mediates salvation and calls forth a response. Merit-making is deemed to be the appropriate response to grace. It refers not only to full participation in the Christian life but also to a comprehensive participation in the socio-economic and political life of the nation.

C. A Synthetic Model of Inculturation

The way in which the interviewees spoke about the inculturation of Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context suggests that they understand it to involve a complex interaction between Thai Buddhist society and Christianity imported by Western missionaries. This understanding of inculturation is consistent with Bevans' synthetic

³ For a discussion of Chalcedon and its contemporary relevance see: K. Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate, Issues in Contemporary Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1984).

model of contextualisation. They are, however, currently unable or unwilling explicitly to articulate their understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity.

5. Christian Missionary Theology and Thai Christian Theology

A. The American Presbyterian Mission and the Church of Christ in Thailand

American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians within the CCT share a common affirmation of Thai Buddhist culture. They all agree that Christians should participate more fully in Thai Buddhist society and that cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society should be incorporated into Thai Christianity. They also share an increasingly positive assessment of Thai Buddhism and encourage the practice of inter-religious dialogue. They accept that it is imperative for Buddhists and Christians to have a greater understanding and appreciation of one another. A minority of Thai Christians are willing to consider ways in which Thai Christians could participate more fully in Thai Buddhist religious culture and ways in which religious aspects of Thai Buddhist society might be incorporated into Thai Christianity. A minority of foreign missionaries, in particular Seely and Butt, have proposed a more radical approach to Thai Buddhism which affirms it as a means of salvation. However, their theology has been met with mixed reactions among American Presbyterian missionaries but has been explicitly rejected by the majority of Thai Christians. Although Thai Christians in the CCT evidence a more positive approach to Thai Buddhism than their Thai Christian ancestors, pre-war American Presbyterian missionaries and ACTC Christians, they still insist that Christianity is qualitatively different to Buddhism, and that in some sense the acceptance of Christianity entails the rejection of Buddhism. Both the American Presbyterian missionaries and CCT Christians demonstrate an acceptance, and utilisation, of the synthetic model of inculturation.

B. The Overseas Missionary Fellowship and the Associated Churches in Thailand - Central

OMF missionaries and Thai Christians in the ACTC are united in their affirmation of Thai culture. Like the American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians in the CCT they all agree that Christians should participate more fully in Thai Buddhist society and that cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society should be incorporated into Thai Christianity. OMF missionaries and Thai Christians in the ACTC are also united in their explicit rejection of Thai Buddhism. Unlike the American Presbyterian missionaries and Thai Christians in the CCT, they actively discourage the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Although a minority of Thai Christians and OMF missionaries are willing to consider ways in which Thai Christians could participate more fully in Thai Buddhist religious culture and ways in which religious aspects of Thai Buddhist society might be incorporated into Thai Christianity, the majority adamantly reject such suggestions. However, despite ACTC Christians' explicit rejection of Thai Buddhism, it is evident that they are engaged in an intense internal dialogue with Thai Buddhism. This has resulted in their adopting Thai Buddhist terms and concepts into Thai Christianity. The presence of an internal inter-religious dialogue among ACTC Christians suggests that they are developing a different approach to Thai Buddhism than that articulated by OMF missionaries. This conclusion is reinforced by the analysis of the ACTC Christians' and OMF missionaries' responses to the questions concerning the presence of God in Thai Buddhist society and the possibility of salvation for Thai Buddhists. Against the view of most OMF missionaries, the majority of ACTC Christians argued that God is present in Thai Buddhist society and that Thai Buddhists could be saved.

It can therefore be concluded that Thai Christians in the ACTC also employ a synthetic model of inculturation. Despite distinguishing between culture and religion, affirming Thai culture and denigrating Thai religion, the ACTC interviewees draw on Thai religious beliefs and practices in the process of inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context. By contrast, OMF missionaries distinguish between culture and religion and insist that Christianity should be inculturated within Thai

culture without reference to Thai religion. This suggests that the OMF translation model of inculturation has been implicitly rejected by Thai Christians in the ACTC.

C. The Influence of Christian Missionaries on Thai Christian Theology

The dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity occurs in both the CCT and the ACTC. It occurs irrespective of the foreign missionaries' attitude toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. APM missionaries, in favour of a radical reinterpretation of Buddhism and Christianity, have been unable to dictate the dialogue agenda in the CCT. OMF missionaries, critical of Thai Buddhism and opposed to dialogue with Buddhism, have been unable to silence the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity within the ACTC. Missionaries have, however, influenced the form that dialogue takes. APM missionaries have fostered a climate within which an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity may occur. OMF missionaries, on the other hand, have made it extremely difficult for an explicit dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity to flourish. In this context the dialogue undertaken by ACTC Christians can be described as implicit.

6. Contributions to Contemporary Research on Thai Christianity: Hughes and Fordham⁴

In the introduction the author stated her intention to test the findings of two theses on Thai Christianity: one, "Christianity and Culture: A Case Study in Northern Thailand," by Philip Hughes;⁵ the other, "Protestant Christianity and the Transformation of Northern Thai Culture: Ritual Practice, Belief and Kinship," by Graham Fordham.⁶ The author will now compare the research findings of those theses with that of her own and suggest ways in which this thesis contributes to contemporary research on Thai Christianity.

The present thesis rejects Hughes' assertion that Christianity has merely been assimilated into Thai Buddhist culture. It argues, with Fordham, that Thai

⁴ See Introduction, 3., D., "Two Seminal Works on Thai Christianity."

⁵ Ph.D., South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, Chiangmai, 1983.

⁶ Ph.D., Department of Anthropology, The University of Adelaide, 1991.

Christianity represents a synthesis of Thai Buddhism and Christianity imported by foreign missionaries in which both Thai Buddhism and Western Christianity have been transformed in the creation of Thai Christianity. The research data that have been examined indicate that such synthesis is evident both in North and Central Thailand. A synthesis between Buddhism and Christianity occurs irrespective of the different understandings of the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity. Thai Christians, who insist that conversion to Christianity necessitates a rejection of Thai Buddhism, and those who understand Christianity to be continuous with Thai Buddhism, both draw on Buddhism in understanding and articulating their faith. Furthermore, the synthesis between Buddhism and Christianity occurs irrespective of the relationship between the foreign missionaries and Thai Christians. Thai Christians, who are relatively independent of foreign missionaries, and those who are in close proximity to the missionaries, both synthesise Buddhist and Christian beliefs and practices within Thai Christianity.

The current research proffers a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism than that expounded by Fordham. It elucidates the complexity of the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism, demonstrating that Thai Christians engage with both Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. Thai Christianity therefore represents a synthesis of Christianity and both Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism. The research shows that the different understandings, experiences, and attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism do not have a significant effect on the synthesis. Despite their different religious backgrounds Thai Christians in the CCT and ACTC evidence a similar approach to Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism that results in a similar synthesis. Both groups of Thai Christians were willing to engage with Thai culture. Both participate in cultural aspects of Thai Buddhist society and are beginning to explore how Thai Buddhist culture might contribute to Thai Christianity. Both groups, however, explicitly rejected Thai Buddhism. The majority of the interviewees, from both the CCT and ACTC, insisted that conversion to Christianity entailed a rejection of Thai Buddhism, that Christians should not participate in Thai Buddhist practices and that Thai Buddhism had nothing to contribute to Thai

Christianity. Nonetheless all demonstrated an implicit acceptance of Thai Buddhism, drawing on Thai Buddhist beliefs and practices in order to articulate their Christian faith.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Thai Christians have a coherent understanding of the central elements of Christian faith, in their Buddhist religio-cultural context, and an increasing confidence in their distinct Thai Christian identity. They have given their faith its own Thai character and contextuality and in doing so Thai Christianity has developed its own characteristics that distinguish it from Christianity in other parts of the world, just as Thai Buddhism is distinct from other expressions of Buddhism. It may, therefore, be argued that Thai Christians are ready to dialogue with other contextual theologies both in the west and non-western world. Dialogue between different contextual theologies would contribute to the emergence of a global Christian theology that was characterised by and celebrated the diverse expressions of the Christian faith, rather than dogmatised any one Christian theology.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to elucidate our understanding of Protestant Christianity in Thailand through an examination of the two major Protestant missions -- the American Presbyterian Mission and the Overseas Missionary Fellowship -- and the churches they established: the Church of Christ in Thailand and the Associated Churches of Thailand – Central, respectively. Within a historical framework ranging from the mid-nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century, the research has focused on the emerging character of Thai Christianity through a combination of archival and ethnographic studies. By way of conclusion it is appropriate to return to the four themes with which the thesis began, and assess the degree to which they are elucidated by the research data that has been adduced.¹

Firstly, the research set out to assess the degree to which equal partnership between overseas mission and indigenous churches was the goal of APM and OMF in relation to CCT and ACTC respectively. In this regard the research has shown that APM was more willing to move toward an equal partnership with the churches they established than OMF. APM was committed to the missiological ideals emerging out of the ecumenical movement, and returned to Thailand after the Second World War determined to implement those ideals. Thai Christians were invited to co-administer the mission (APM) and church (CCT) until 1957 when they accepted full responsibility for the church; the mission was closed and the missionaries were integrated into the CCT. Since 1957 the number of American Presbyterian missionaries and their influence in CCT has been significantly reduced. The church is now a Thai organisation, run by the Thai and for the Thai. Foreign personnel work within it under Thai leadership. By contrast, OMF was unwilling to work with CCT and set itself up as an independent para-church organisation. The churches established by OMF formed a new denomination, ACTC. Although it had been the policy of the China Inland Mission, the predecessor of OMF, to ensure an appropriate relationship between mission and church in China, OMF found it

¹ See Introduction, 3., "Research Themes."

difficult to implement this policy in Thailand and eventually jettisoned it. Throughout the 1960s OMF became increasingly autocratic in its dealings with the ACTC churches, and continues to demonstrate an unwillingness to implement policies that would eventuate in an equal partnership between mission and church.

Secondly, the research aimed to assess the degree to which a comparative analysis of the missionaries' attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and religion reveals a more positive evaluation on the part of American Presbyterians than on the part of OMF missionaries. An analysis of the missions' approaches toward Thai Buddhist culture demonstrates that APM was more positive toward Thai Buddhist culture than OMF. After the Second World War APM committed itself to developing a new relationship with Thai culture. American Presbyterian missionaries began to use Thai drama, music and dance in evangelism and worship. APM also initiated a more open approach toward Thai Buddhism. It was aware that its pre-war failure to understand and sympathise with Thai Buddhism had had a detrimental effect on the Thai church. To repair this, American Presbyterian missionaries were encouraged to study Thai Buddhism and develop a more dialogical engagement with Thai Buddhists. Some Presbyterian missionaries became expert in Christian-Buddhist studies. The Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures were inaugurated in 1962, the Dhamma-Logos Project was established in 1974, and the Institute for the Study of Religion and Culture of Payap University opened in 1998; each provided a forum for Christian-Buddhist studies and inter-religious dialogue. By contrast, OMF showed very little interest in Buddhist studies or inter-religious dialogue. OMF policy was to encourage missionaries to learn the Thai language, but this did not extend to serious study either of Thai culture or Thai Buddhism, and attitudes expressed by OMF missionaries reveal that they did not consider an understanding of Thai Buddhism to be essential for Christian mission in Thailand.

Thirdly, the research has assessed the degree to which Thai Christians draw on their three religious heritages: Thai Christianity, Thai Buddhism and post-war mission theology, in the process of inculturating Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context. The research findings show that Thai Christians draw on both Buddhism and

Christianity, engaging with their Thai Christian heritage and post-war mission theology, in order to understand and to articulate their Christian faith. In-depth analysis reveals that their Christian beliefs about God, obedience, spirits, sin and salvation have been significantly influenced by both Christian and Buddhist concepts and terminology. Thai Christians implicitly draw on Thai Buddhism in order to inculturate their Christian faith, and feel legitimate in doing so since they speak more positively than many missionaries, especially those in OMF, about the presence of God in Thai Buddhist culture, and possibility of salvation for Thai Buddhists. Their implicit and explicit interpretations of Christian faith indicate that they do not perceive the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism in terms of discontinuity. God is perceived to be active in Thai Buddhist culture which is therefore legitimated as a context in which the Gospel can be inculturated.

Fourthly, the research has assessed the degree to which Thai Christians are expressing an indigenous understanding of Christianity, independent of western missionaries, with their own theological agenda. The research demonstrates that foreign missionaries actually have a diminishing influence on the Thai Christians' attitudes towards Thai Buddhist culture, their approach to dialogue with Thai Buddhism and, consequently, on the form that Christianity is taking in Thailand. Thai Christians have been exposed to quite different missiological approaches to Thai Buddhist culture by APM and OMF respectively, but CCT and ACTC nonetheless articulate similar attitudes toward Thai Buddhist culture and dialogue with Thai Buddhism. CCT Christians have rejected what they consider to be inappropriate approaches toward Thai Buddhist culture espoused by Seely and Butt. On the other hand ACTC Christians have refused to be confined by the OMF missionaries' negative assessment of Thai Buddhist culture. As a consequence Thai Christians from CCT and ACTC are developing a positive approach toward Thai Buddhist culture that they deem appropriate to their Thai context. Their open, searching, self-reflexive approach to Thai Buddhist culture is evidence of their engagement in a dynamic process of inculturation from which the articulation and practice of an indigenously authentic Thai Christianity is emerging.

The research has shown beyond doubt that selected Thai Christians are beginning to formulate a contextual understanding of central Christian doctrines. They are consciously appropriating their Christian faith in the Thai context, in response to their three religious heritages: Thai Buddhist heritage, Thai Christian heritage and post-war mission theology. In dialogue with these three heritages, they reject and accept elements from each tradition. The emergent Thai Christianity consists of a complex synthesis of beliefs and rituals that represent a transformation of Thai Buddhism and missionary Christianity in a distinct Thai Christian identity. Thai Christians are the authors of their own contextual theology. Their Christian beliefs represent an increasingly confident, distinctive contextual theology that demonstrates their ability to incarnate the Gospel in Thai Buddhist culture in a manner that merits attention in the global context.

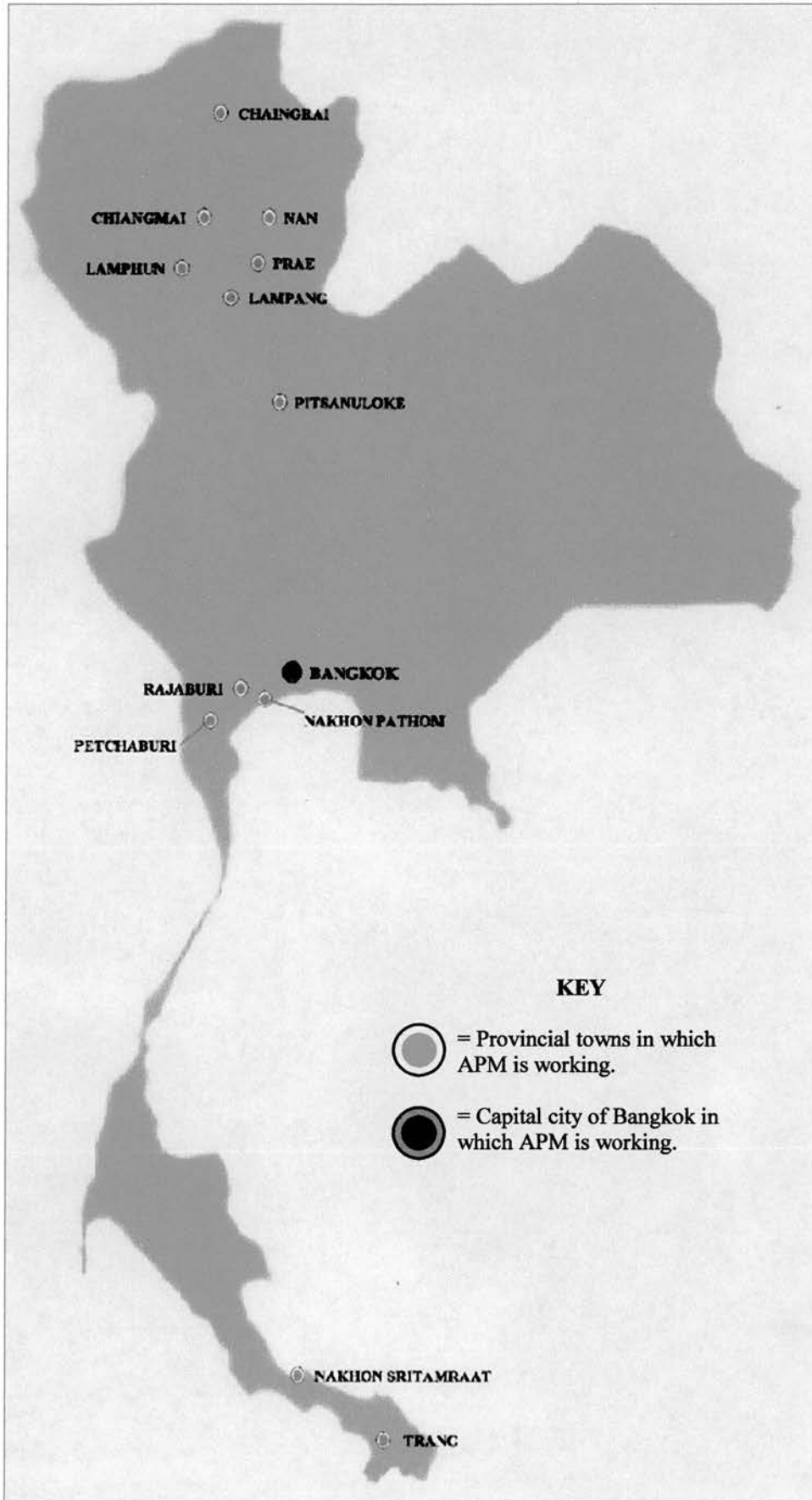
The current research has advanced our understanding of Thai Christianity. In particular it has illuminated our understanding of the synthesis of Buddhism and Christianity that is occurring in Thailand. It discredits Hughes' thesis that Christianity has merely been assimilated into Thai Buddhist culture. It confirms, illustrates and develops Fordham's thesis that Thai Christianity consists of a synthesis of Buddhism and Christianity. It has shown that the synthesis between Buddhism and Christianity occurs irrespective of the religious heritage of Thai Christians, and no matter what approach foreign missionaries have taken toward Thai Buddhist culture.

The thesis has not, however, explored every facet of Thai Christianity. It has not been able to explore the Thai Christian response to the social, political and economic injustices inherent in modern Thailand, or the struggle to address these issues in the emerging Thai Christian liberation theologies. It has not examined the relationship between inculturation and liberation. These are issues that call for further study. Furthermore, it lies beyond the limits of this thesis to examine ways in which dialogue between contextual theologies in Thailand and other parts of Asia has been taking shape, and could develop in the future. The value of this thesis, within its stated limits, is that it demonstrates that Thai Christianity is of a contextual maturity

that makes it possible to engage with contextual theologies in other parts of Asia and the world.

Appendix 1

Map 1: The American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand



Map 2: The Overseas Missionary Fellowship in Central Thailand



KEY

- © = General Clinics established by OMF.
- ✚ = Hospitals established by OMF.
- | = Rivers
- | = Railway
- = Provincial towns in which OMF is working.
- = District towns in which OMF is working.



Appendix 2

1. Interview Schedule for Western Missionaries

A. Personal History

1. Please tell me about your decision to become a Christian?
2. Please tell me about your decision to work as a missionary in Thailand? Have you had any training either full-time or part-time? What college did you attend? Did it have a particular point of view? How did your understanding of Christianity change during that time? What was the most important aspect of your time in training? Did it help you understand your faith better?
3. Please tell me about your time in Thailand?

At this point in the interview interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences in Thailand. They were also asked specific questions, particular to the individual and their experiences, about the history of the church/mission in Thailand?

B. Personal Theology

1. What do you think are the basic articles of the Christian faith?
2. What do you think of as the essential elements of Christian practice that should be present in the life of every Christian?
3. How would you explain your faith to a Thai Buddhist? Are there some things you say first or emphasise because you think they are more important? Do you try to relate your Christian faith to Buddhism at all? Do you talk about Buddhism when sharing your faith? What do you say? Do you use Buddhist words to explain your faith? Do you think that there are other ways, ways of using Buddhist ideas or language, by which the Gospel could be explained to Thai Buddhists? Do you think of the Gospel as good news? If you share it as good news, why do you think Thai people do not receive it as such? The gospel has been in Thailand a long time now, why is it still regarded as the foreigners' religion?

4. Recently there has been a lot of talk about the need to 'contextualise' or 'indigenise' the Gospel? Do you think there are other ways that Christianity could be better communicated to Thai Buddhists? Do you think the Gospel could be explained by:
 - a. Affirming the reality of *kamma* and explaining that God breaks the power of *kamma*?
 - b. Talking about Jesus Christ as the one who sets us free from *kamma* and as the one who makes merit for us?
 - c. Talking about Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the *dhamma* who provides a fuller revelation of the *dhamma*?
5. Do you know about the Buddhist prophecy about the *Phra See An*? Some Thai Christians have interpreted Jesus Christ as the *Phra See An*. Do you think that is a helpful way to explain to Buddhists who Jesus Christ is? If yes please say why. If not, why not?
6. What do you think a Thai Buddhist must understand about the Christian faith before they can choose to become a Christian? What changes would you expect in the life of a Thai Buddhist who said that they had become a Christian? Would you expect them to make a complete break with Thai Buddhist culture? What aspects of Thai Buddhist culture do you think a Thai Christian can participate in? What aspects of Thai Buddhist culture should Christians not participate in? Have you always understood it that way? If what you think about this has changed since you became a Christian, when did your thinking change and why did it change?
7. Do you think that Thai Buddhism can contribute anything to Christianity in Thailand? Are there Thai Buddhist doctrines or practices that Christians should retain?
8. Do you think God is active in Thai Buddhist culture? Do you think God was active in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived? How? Where? What is the relationship between God's work in Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism? What are the implications for Christian mission in Thailand?
9. It has been said that Buddhism was a force for good in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived, would you agree with this, or disagree, and

why? In what way has Buddhism had a positive, and in what way a negative, influence in Thailand? How do you understand Buddhism, as demonic, human or God given?

10. Do you expect to see Thai Buddhists who have not heard the Gospel in heaven? If not, why not? If so, on what basis?
11. Has your personal theology changed at all since your conversion? In what way and why?
12. Do you know what APM's/OMF's theological position is on the above points? Have you ever differed with that? If so on what points and why?

2. Interview Schedule for Thai Christians

A. Personal History

1. Please tell me about your home and family. Please tell me about the place of religion in your family, religious practices in the home/at the temple.
2. When did you first hear about Christianity? What did you understand Christianity to be about? What was attractive? What was unattractive? What did you think the missionaries were doing in Thailand? What made you decide to become a Christian?
3. When did you first join a church? Where was that? Who was the pastor? Why did you join the church? Would you like to say more about belonging to a church? Have Thai people had a part in the decision-making in the church? Have the Thai church and the mission worked in partnership with one another or not? What has been your experience of partnership with missionary personnel?
4. Could you please tell me how you came to be a full-time worker/pastor? Have you had any training either full-time or part-time? What college did you attend? Did it have a particular point of view? How did your understanding of Christianity change during that time? What was the most important aspect of your time in training? Did it help you understand your faith better?
5. Looking back, now, how do you see your beliefs changing when you became a Christian?

At this point in the interview the interviewees were asked specific questions, particular to the individual and their experiences, about the history of the church/mission in Thailand?

B. Personal Theology

1. What do you think are the basic articles of the Christian faith?
2. What do you think of as the essential elements of Christian practice that should be present in the life of every Christian?
3. How would you explain your faith to a Thai Buddhist? Are there some things you say first or emphasise because you think they are more important? Do you try to relate your Christian faith to Buddhism at all? Do you talk about Buddhism when sharing your faith? What do you say? Do you use Buddhist words to explain your faith? Do you think that there are other ways, ways of using Buddhist ideas or language, by which the Gospel could be explained to Thai Buddhists? Do you think of the Gospel as good news? If you share it as good news, why do you think Thai people do not receive it as such? The gospel has been in Thailand a long time now, why is it still regarded as the foreigners' religion?
4. Recently there has been a lot of talk about the need to 'contextualise' or 'indigenise' the Gospel? Do you think there are other ways that Christianity could be better communicated to Thai Buddhists? Do you think the Gospel could be explained by:
 - a. Affirming the reality of *kamma* and explaining that God breaks the power of *kamma*?
 - b. Talking about Jesus Christ as the one who sets us free from *kamma* and as the one who makes merit for us?
 - c. Talking about Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the *dhamma* who provides a fuller revelation of the *dhamma*?
5. Do you know about the Buddhist prophecy about the *Phra See An*? Some Thai Christians have interpreted Jesus Christ as the *Phra See An*. Do you think that is a helpful way to explain to Buddhists who Jesus Christ is? If yes please say why. If not, why not?

6. What do you think a Thai Buddhist must understand about the Christian faith before they can choose to become a Christian? What changes would you expect in the life of a Thai Buddhist who said that they had become a Christian? Would you expect them to make a complete break with Thai Buddhist culture? What aspects of Thai Buddhist culture do you think a Thai Christian can participate in? What aspects of Thai Buddhist culture should Christians not participate in? Have you always understood it that way? If what you think about this has changed since you became a Christian, when did your thinking change and why did it change?
7. Do you think that Thai Buddhism can contribute anything to Christianity in Thailand? Are there Thai Buddhist doctrines or practices that Christians should retain? Do you include distinctly Thai Buddhist practices in your life?
8. Do you think God is active in Thai Buddhist culture? Do you think God was active in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived? How? Where? What is the relationship between God's work in Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism? What are the implications for Christian mission in Thailand?
9. It has been said that Buddhism was a force for good in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived, would you agree with this, or disagree, and why? In what way has Buddhism had a positive, and in what way a negative, influence in Thailand? How do you understand Buddhism, as demonic, human or God given?
10. Do you expect to see Thai Buddhists who have not heard the Gospel in heaven? If not, why not? If so on what basis?
11. Has your personal theology changed at all since your conversion? In what way and why?
12. Do you know what APM's/OMF's theological position is on the above points? Have you ever differed with that? If so on what points and why?

3. Focus Group Schedule

1. Have you ever had an opportunity to study Buddhism/Thai Buddhism? Do you think an understanding of Buddhism is helpful for missionaries working in Thailand? Why?

2. How would you explain your faith to a Thai Buddhist? Are there some things you say first or emphasise because you think they are more important? Do you try to relate your Christian faith to Buddhism at all? Do you talk about Buddhism when sharing your faith? What do you say? Do you use Buddhist words to explain your faith? Do you think that there are other ways, ways of using Buddhist ideas or language, by which the Gospel could be explained to Thai Buddhists? Do you think of the Gospel as good news? If you share it as good news, why do you think Thai people do not receive it as such? The gospel has been in Thailand a long time now, why is it still regarded as the foreigners' religion?
3. Recently there has been a lot of talk about the need to 'contextualise' or 'indigenise' the Gospel? Do you think there are other ways that Christianity could be better communicated to Thai Buddhists? Do you think the Gospel could be explained by:
 - a. Affirming the reality of *kamma* and explaining that God breaks the power of *kamma*?
 - b. Talking about Jesus Christ as the one who sets us free from *kamma* and as the one who makes merit for us?
 - c. Talking about Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the *dhamma* who provides a fuller revelation of the *dhamma*?
4. Do you know about the Buddhist prophecy about the *Phra See An*? Some Thai Christians have interpreted Jesus Christ as the *Phra See An*. Do you think that is a helpful way to explain to Buddhists who Jesus Christ is? If yes please say why. If not, why not?
5. Have you heard of John Davis' 'Creed for the Thai'? Does it help you to understand the Christian faith more fully and to explain the Christian faith more effectively in Thailand?
6. Do you think that Thai Buddhism can contribute anything to Christianity in Thailand? Are there Thai Buddhist doctrines or practices that Christians should retain?
7. Do you think God is active in Thai Buddhist culture? Do you think God was active in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived? How? Where? What

- is the relationship between God's work in Thai Buddhist culture and Thai Buddhism? What are the implications for Christian mission in Thailand?
8. It has been said that Buddhism was a force for good in Thailand before Christian missionaries arrived, would you agree with this, or disagree, and why? In what way has Buddhism had a positive, and in what way a negative, influence in Thailand? How do you understand Buddhism, as demonic, human or God given?
 9. Do you expect to see Thai Buddhists who have not heard the Gospel in heaven? If not, why not? If so on what basis?
 10. Has your personal theology changed at all since your conversion? In what way and why?
 11. Do you know what APM's/OMF's theological position is on the above points? Have you ever differed with that? If so on what points and why?

Appendix 3

1. CCT Interviewees

Boonma Wannalai. Boonma's family were Christians. After completing his secondary school education he studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University graduating with a B.Th. He was ordained in CCT and worked as a pastor in various CCT churches in Chiangmai province before accepting an administrative position within CCT in North Thailand. He was 65 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Chamnarn Saengchai. Chamnarn's family were Buddhists. He completed his secondary school education and graduated with a B.A. from the Teachers Training College in Chiangmai. He studied theology at the Theology Faculty of Payap University and in Korea. He was ordained in CCT and worked as a pastor in various CCT churches in North Thailand before being appointed as the Coordinator of Evangelism in CCT in 1978. He worked as the Chaplain of Dara School in Chiangmai between 1979-1991 returning to the Evangelism Department of CCT to work as an evangelist, 1991-1994. He has been working as a pastor in Chiangmai province since 1994. He was 55 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Chuleepran Srisoontorn Persons. Chuleepran's family were Buddhist. She converted to Christianity while still at school. She studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for six years, 1984-1987, before completing a M.Th. in the USA. She was ordained in CCT and worked as the assistant to the First Thai Church in Chiangmai. She completed a Ph.D. in theology in 1989 and returned to teach at the Theology Faculty of Payap University, 1989-1993. She has worked as a pastor in CCT since 1995. She is married with three children.

Damrong Up-Ngan. Damrong's family were Christians. He was working as an evangelist in the Department of Evangelism of CCT at the time of interview.

John Mark Tomthai. John Mark's family were Thai-American Christians. He has been a member of the International Church in Bangkok since he was a child. He taught at Prince Royal College for a while and now teaches at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.

Khunakorn Khunasawad. Kunakorn grew up in a Christian home on the Christian farm in Chiangrai, established by the Chiangrai Rural Project. His parents were both teachers. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for seven years. After being ordained in CCT he worked as a pastoral assistant in the First Church in Chiangmai. He served as the Chaplain at McKean Leprosy Hospital, 1988-1990. Since then he has worked as a pastor in a number of different CCT churches in North Thailand. He was 38 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Kratsanai Chaiklaa. Kratsanai's family were Buddhist. After converting to Christianity he studied at Phayao Bible College for three years and then at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for two years. He worked with the Leprosy Control Team in Manorum, 1967-1971. Since then he has served as a pastor in CCT, in both North and South Thailand. He was 50 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Mana Duangsuwan. Mana's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for four years before being ordained in CCT and commencing work as a pastor. He was 38 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Manit Khamlaphit. Manit's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for five years before commencing work as a pastor in CCT. He was 34 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Marisa Ninlakun. Marisa's family were Christians. She studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for seven years and then worked in the Department of

Education of CCT in Chiangmai, 1987-1994. Since then she has worked as the Chaplain of McCormick Hospital in Chiangmai. She was 38 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Phakdee Wattanachankun. Phakdee's family were Christians. He completed a BD and M.Div. at the Theology Faculty of Payap University before being ordained in CCT and commencing work as a pastor. He has held a number of positions within CCT, working as the Director of the Youth Department of CCT, 1976-1979, and Coordinator of Church Development and Renewal, 1980-1982. Since then he has worked in the First Church in Chiangmai. He was 53 years old and single at the time of interview.

Phongsak Sinthumat. Phongsak's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for seven years before being ordained in CCT and appointed as a pastor. He was 34 years old and married with no children at the time of interview.

Picharn Chaithi. Picharn's family were Christians. His father worked for World Vision. He spent six years; at the Theology Faculty of Payap University before working as a pastor in CCT. He was 35 years old and recently married with no children at the time of interview.

Pradit Takerngrangsarit. Pradit's family were Christians. He studied theology, first at Theology Faculty of Payap University, and then in New Zealand where he graduated with a Ph.D. He served as principal of the Theology Faculty of Payap University for a brief period in 1995 and then accepted an appointment as Vice President of Student Affairs at Payap University.

Prakai Nontawasee. Pakai's family were Christians. She studied and then lectured at the Theology Faculty of Payap University succeeding John Hamlin as principal of the seminary in 1974. She was still actively involved in the seminary at the time of interview.

Prasaat Pansuay. Prasaat's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University before being ordained and working as a pastor in CCT. He was 35 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Saattraa Buayen. Saattraa's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University before working being ordained and working as a pastor in CCT. He was 29 years old at the time of interview.

Sanan Wuti. Sanan's family were Christians. He attended Teachers Training College, taught for one year and then enrolled at the Theology Faculty of Payap University where he completed a BA and M.Div. He was ordained in CCT and has worked as a pastor in a number of CCT churches in North Thailand. He was 43 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Sanay Wangcharern. Sanay's family were Buddhist. He studied at Bangkok University before enrolling at the Theology Faculty of Payap University where he spent a further five years. He has worked as a pastor in a number of CCT churches. He was 55 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Somchit Huanaa. Somchit's family were Christians. He studied at Sukhothai University, the Christian Service Training Centre in Chiangmai and the Theology Faculty of Payap University, where he completed a BA and M.Div. He was ordained in CCT and has worked as a pastor in a number of CCT churches in North Thailand. He was 39 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Suphaphorn Yarnsarn. Suphaphorn's family were Christian. She completed a degree in Fine Arts at Chiangrai University before enrolling in the Theology Faculty of Payap University. She completed an M.Div. at Payap University and then worked as teacher at Prince Royal College, Chiangmai. Since 1991 she has worked as Chaplain at Prince Royal College. She was 49 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Suttichai Wuti. Suttichai's family were Christians. He studied at the Christian Service Training Centre in Chiangmai for three years and then at the Theology Faculty of Payap University. He worked with World Vision, 1979-1985, before commencing work as a pastor in CCT. He was 40 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Thiraphong Chaisri. Thiraphong's family were Christians. He completed five years at the Theology Faculty of Payap University before working as a pastor in CCT. He was 32 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Thongchai Suwannaa. Thongchai's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for five years before being ordained in CCT and commencing work as a pastor. He has served in a number of CCT churches in North Thailand. He was 55 years old and married at the time of interview.

Thongkham Kanthawee. Thongkham's family were Christians. He completed seven years at the Theology Faculty of Payap University graduating with a B.Th. He was ordained in CCT and has worked as a pastor in both North and South Thailand. He was 55 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Uthit Ariyaat. Uthit's family were Christians. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University and has since worked as a pastor in a number of CCT churches in North Thailand. He was 39 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Wicha Nathikhunnatham. Wicha's family were Buddhist. After converting to Christianity Wicha studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for six years before being ordained in CCT. He has since worked as a pastor in a number of churches in North Thailand. He was 58 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Yothin Khampheera. Yothin's family were Christian. He studied at the Theology Faculty of Payap University for five years before commencing work as a pastor in the CCT. He was 29 years old at the time of interview.

2. ACTC Interviewees

Arphon Chaleerin. Arphon's family were Buddhists. He entered the Buddhist priesthood at a young age and attended a Buddhist University in Bangkok. He converted to Christianity after leaving the Buddhist priesthood. After his conversion he worked closely with Dr. Chris Maddox, first as a Business Manager at Manorom Christian Hospital and later in Laos. He has studied Theology in the Philippines, in New Zealand, at Bangkok Bible College, and Capernwray Bible College in England. He was secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT) from 1972. He retired in 1997 but continued to play an active role in EFT. He was 77 years old at the time of interview.

Boonma Wayhuay. Boonma's family were Buddhists. He completed secondary education and planned to study as a lawyer but was prevented from doing so when he was found to have leprosy. He came into contact with OMF missionaries and heard about Christianity while receiving treatment for leprosy. After converting to Christianity he attended Maranatha Bible College for four years. He has worked as a lay leader, and later full-time pastor, in ACTC for many years, initially while employed in the Pathology Laboratory at Manorom Christian Hospital and later as a full-time evangelist at Manorom Christian Hospital. He was 59 years old at the time of interview and is married with two children.

Boonmee Meelon. Boonmee's family were Buddhists. He came from a farming family and received four years primary education before working in the fields. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk when twenty-one years old. He was diagnosed with leprosy in his early twenties and first heard the Gospel while receiving treatment at Talukdu clinic, Uthai province. After he became a Christian he attended Maranatha Bible College and worked as an area pastor in Uthai province. He is now

a senior pastor in Uthai province. He was 62 years old and married with two adopted children at the time of interview.

Boonsing Suphan. Boonsing's family were Buddhist but later converted to Christianity. He completed his secondary education and then attended Phayao Bible College for three years. From 1987-1993 he worked as a pastor in Phayao province, North Thailand, after which he moved to Central Thailand where has worked as a pastor of the Lan Sak church, Uthai province, since 1994. He was 32 years old and married with three children at the time of interview.

Chalor Roberts. Chalor's family were Buddhists. After converting to Christianity she studied at Phayao Bible College. She is married to a North American OMF missionary and works as a missionary in North Thailand.

Mana Noomaa. Mana's family were Christians from ACTC. He completed his secondary education and then studied at Phayao Bible College and Bangkok Bible College, where he graduated with a BA in Theology. He pastored a church in Uttradit, Northeast Thailand, before returning to Central Thailand where he works as a pastor in Lopburi church. He was 29 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Mana Suanboon. Mana's family were Christians from CCT, North Thailand. He completed his secondary education and then studied at Phayao Bible College for three years. He then moved to Central Thailand and commenced work as a pastor in ACTC. He has pastored Barnrai church, Uthai province, since 1986. He was 37 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Notsit Kamnerdnathee. Notsit's family were Christians from CCT, North Thailand. He completed three years of secondary school and then studied at Phayao Bible College for three years. He then moved to Central Thailand and commenced work as a pastor in ACTC. He has worked as a pastor in Uthai province since 1995. He was 23 years old and unmarried at the time of interview.

Phlern Yanyiam. Phlern's family were Buddhists. After converting to Christianity he studied at Phayao Bible College. He then worked as a pastor in ACTC for six years before enrolling at Bangkok Bible College where he gained a BA in Theology. Since 1991 he has worked as pastor of Saraburi church. He was 39 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Pramuaphorn Sonserm. Pramuaphorn's family were Buddhists, her father was a Buddhist monk. She completed her secondary education, studied to be a primary school teacher and then went to Phayao Bible College where she graduated with a BA in Theology. She worked as a Thai language teacher at Lopburi Language Centre before being appointed as pastor of Lopburi church in 1997. She was 35 years old at the time of interview.

Prasit Yaakham. Prasit's family were Buddhist. He first heard the Gospel from OMF missionaries while receiving medical care for tuberculosis. After converting to Christianity he studied at Phayao Bible College. He has worked as a pastor in ACTC for twenty-seven years. He was 51 years old and married with three children at the time of interview.

Prawit Somchai. Prawit's family were Christians from CCT, North Thailand. Prawit completed secondary education, studied at Phayao Bible College, Bangkok Bible College and then Sukhothai University. Prior to beginning full-time church work he worked as a manager in World Vision. He co-founded the second Uthai town church in 1993 and has been the pastor there since 1997. He was 32 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Ratchanee Chanwongthong. Ratchanee's family were Buddhists. After graduating from Ramaken Heang University in Bangkok she worked in Bangkok for seven years. In 1991 she enrolled at Bangkok Bible College and after graduating in 1993 worked for an ACT church in Bangkok. She was working as Chaplain at Manorom Christian Hospital at the time of interview. She was 38 years old.

Riab Sukkasem. Riab's family were Buddhists. He completed three years primary education. He developed leprosy at a young age and became severely deformed before receiving treatment. He heard about Christianity while receiving medical treatment at Manorum Christian Hospital. He was actively involved in the Leprosy Believers' Church for many years. Riab has composed many Thai Christian worship songs set to traditional Thai tunes since his conversion to Christianity over thirty years ago. He was 84 years old at the time of interview.

Samphan Direksuk. Samphan's family were Buddhists. He completed secondary school and then worked with a construction firm. He has worked as a plumber at Manorum Christian Hospital since 1954 and served as a lay leader in the Manorum church. He was 66 years old and married with five children at the time of interview.

Samryt Meetoeng. Samryt's family were Buddhists. He completed five years secondary education and after taking a number of different jobs came to work at Manorum Christian Hospital. He converted to Christianity while working at the hospital. He spent three years at Phayao Bible College before commencing work as a pastor/evangelist in ACTC. He was 59 years old at the time of interview.

Sanun Muangchui. Sanun family were Buddhists. He completed four years primary education. He was diagnosed with leprosy at an early age and received treatment at Manorum Christian Hospital where he converted to Christianity. He spent one year at Maranatha Bible College before returning to work in the Manorum Christian Hospital print shop. He is a lay preacher in ACTC, travelling through Central Thailand. He was married with one child at the time of interview.

Somchai Phromthaisong. Somchai family were Buddhists. After leaving school he worked as the caretaker of Uthai church. He studied theology at the Pentecostal Bible School attached to the Jaisaman Church in Bangkok and then commenced work as a pastor with ACTC. He was 38 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Somsak Phongthannakorn. Somsak's family were Buddhists. He was born in Uthai His father was a shop keeper. He completed secondary education and then studied for four years at Phayao Bible College. He had two pastorates in Bangkok, both lasting about a year. Since 1992 he has worked in the ACTC Christian bookshop in Nakhon Sawan. He was 37 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Songkhram Chanphaak. Songkhram's family were Buddhists. He only had two years primary education and has worked as a farmer all his life. Throughout that time he has served as a lay church leader in ACTC. He was 58 years old and married with three children at the time of interview.

Suphon Yoodee. Suphon's family were Christians from CCT, in North Thailand. He studied at Phayao Bible College and then commenced work as a pastor in ACTC, Uthai church. He was 28 years old and married with one child at the time of interview.

Suphot Sriprasaad. Suphot's family were Buddhists. He converted to Christianity while receiving treatment for leprosy at Manorom Christian Hospital. He studied at Maranatha Bible College for three years and then returned to Manorom where he now lives and works. Since 1975 has been manager of the print shop at Manorom Christian Hospital. He is also an elder in the Manorom church. He was 58 and married with one child at the time of interview.

Surachai Chanwilak. Surachai's family were Buddhists. He studied at Bangkok Bible College graduating with a B.Th. He then worked as a pastor in ACTC. He was 40 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Suttiophorn Somchai. Suttiophorn's family were Christians from CCT, North Thailand. His parents were farmers. He completed secondary education, studied at Bangkok Bible College and then Phayao Bible College. He spent two years in the

army before commencing work as a pastor in ACTC. He has been Chairman of ACTC since 1996. He was 37 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Teng Prasert. Teng's family were Buddhists. He received treatment for leprosy at Manorom Christian Hospital where he converted to Christianity. Teng worked as an orthopaedic appliance technician, first at the leprosy wing in Manorom Christian Hospital and later at McKean Leprosy Hospital. At the time of interview he had retired and was living in Chiangmai.

Thawat Yenchai. Thawat family were Buddhists. After converting to Christianity he studied at Bangkok Bible College for two years and then worked with OMF publishers. He then lectured at Phayao Bible College for seven years. He now pastors an indigenous Thai church in Chiangmai. He was 46 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Toob Maasatit. Toob's family were Buddhists. He had three years secondary education. He worked as a government clerk but had to leave after three years because he was found to have leprosy. He was the first to be treated for leprosy by OMF in Central Thailand. He converted to Christianity and was active in the Leprosy Believers' Church for many years. He has written a number of Thai Christian songs. He was 70 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Wicharn Khowiam. Wicharn family were Buddhists. He was ordained as a Buddhist monk as a teenager. After converting to Christianity he studied at Phayao Bible College for four years. He has worked in various churches in Central Thailand: Anghong, Manorom, Tartago. He also worked with World Vision for two years. He has been pastor of Chainat church since 1981. He was 48 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Winitchai Chaimawong. Winitchai family were Christians from CCT, North Thailand. After studying at Phayao Bible College he commenced work as an

evangelist at Manorom Christian Hospital. He was 38 years old and married with two children at the time of interview.

Yaud Phummun. Yaud's family were Buddhist. He completed secondary school and trained as a carpenter. He has worked as a carpenter at Manorom Christian Hospital since 1961. He is also a lay leader in the Manorom church. He was 62 years old and married with three children at the time of interview.

Glossary

Anatta (Pali): *Anatta* has been defined as "non-self", "non-ego", "egolessness" or "impersonality". It is the last of the three characteristics of existence taught by the Buddha. The *anatta*-doctrine is central to Buddhism.¹

Anicca (Pali): *Anicca* has been defined as "impermanence". It is the first of the three characteristics of existence taught by Buddha and, like *anatta*, is a central doctrine of Buddhism.²

Baab (Thai) (Pali: Papa): *Baab* is a noun meaning "sin" or "fault". *Baab* results in demerit. , .

Bun (Thai) (Pali: Punna): *Bun* is a noun meaning "merit". Moral actions and merit-making activities result in the accumulation of merit.

Dukkha (Pali): *Dukkha*, meaning "pain", "suffering", implying the unsatisfactory nature of life, is the second of the three characteristics of existence taught by the Buddha. The first Noble Truths states that the human condition is characterised by *dukkha*.

Jaak (Thai): *Jaak* is a verb meaning "desire". It does not necessarily involve any religious/Buddhist connotations.

Kam (Thai) (Pali: Kamma, Sanskrit: Karma): *Kam* is a noun meaning "action", "sin" or "misfortune". According to the teaching of Buddha *kam* refers to morally relevant actions, both moral and immoral. However, in Thai the term refers primarily to negative consequences of past immoral actions.

¹ Nyanatiloka. *Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*, 4th revised edition edited by Nyanaponika (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), 14-15.

² Ibid., 16-17.

Khwan (Thai): *Khwan* is a noun referring to the vital essence of a person or elements of a person's soul. These elements are believed to "have a tendency to wander, to become disorganised, or to disintegrate" and a religious ritual known as the soul-tying ritual is performed in order to secure the *khwan*'s well being.³

Loi Krathong (Thai): Loi Krathong is celebrated on the night of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month (usually in mid-November). (Is this right? If it is a lunar month, it will not usually be mid-November) *Loi* means "to float" and *Krathong* is a leaf or a cup normally made of banana leaf. Usually a small coin, a candle and incense are placed inside the *krathong* before floating it down the river. The festival has a number of different interpretations. Some (who?) understand it to represent a prayer to the spirits of the water to take away sin, some as a prayer of thanks giving. Others (who?) do not believe the festival holds any religious significance at all but is merely a time of celebration.

Nippan (Thai) (Nibbana: Pali, Sanskrit: Nirvana): *Nippan* "constitutes the highest and ultimate goal of all Buddhist aspirations."⁴ It is the cessation of life, of all that is characterised by evil: greed, hate, delusion and clinging to existence.⁵

Phak (Thai): *Phak* is a noun meaning "district" or "area" and is used by CCT to refer to the different geographical and ethnic groups that make up CCT.

Phii (Thai): *Phii* is a noun meaning "spirit" or "ghost".

Pit (Thai): *Pit* is a verb meaning "to do wrong" or "to make a mistake". It does not necessarily denote the accumulation of demerit.

³ Kirsch, "Thai Religious System," 253.

⁴ Nyanatiloka. *Buddhist Dictionary*, 124.

⁵ Ibid., 124-125.

Samsara (Pali): *Samsara* refers to the "round of rebirth" or the "continuous process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying."⁶

Sing sung sut (Thai): The term *sing sung sut* denotes "all that is sacred in the universe". It includes spirits, gods, or sacred things.

Songkran (Thai): Songkran is the Thai New Year celebrated from 13-16 April. On the eve of Songkran houses are cleaned and anything old or useless is thrown away. On New Years day everyone wears new clothes and visits the temple to offer food to the monks. In the afternoon Buddha images are bathed as part of the ceremony. Young people pour scented water into the hands of elders and parents as a mark of respect while seeking the blessing of the older people. Young and old throw water over one another. Caged birds are ceremonially released, and fish caught and returned to the river. Both acts are thought to be highly meritorious.

Suad (Thai): *Suad* is an act of Buddhist worship. It denotes chanting, reading or prayers.

Tanha (Pali): *Tanha* means "desire" or "craving" which Buddhists understood to be the chief source of suffering.⁷

Tham or Phra Thamma (Thai) (Pali: Dhamma, Sanskrit: Dharma): *Tham* or *Phra Thamma* is a noun with a range of different meanings including: "constitution" (or nature of a thing), "norm", "law", "doctrine"; "justice", "righteousness"; "quality"; "thing", "object of mind", "phenomenon". Most commonly it refers to the law taught by the Buddha, which is summed up in the 4 Noble Truths.⁸

⁶ Nyanatiloka. *Buddhist Dictionary*, 188.

⁷ Ibid., 207-8.

⁸ Ibid., 55-56.

Tham bun (Thai): *Tham bun* is a verb meaning "to make merit". Many different meritorious acts are referred to by the term *tham bun*. Khantipalo, a Thai Buddhist monk in the Mahanikai order, maintains that there are ten ways of making merit: giving, moral conduct, mind-development, reverence, helpfulness, dedicating meritorious acts to others, rejoicing in the meritorious acts of others, listening to the *Dhamma*, teaching the *Dhamma*, and "straightening out one's views."⁹

Tham dii daj dii, tham chua daj chua (Thai): This is a common Thai phrase, the literal meaning of which is "do good get good, do evil get evil."

Weenkam (Thai): *Weenkam* refers specifically to "ill fate" or "misfortune" that result from immoral deeds.

Wai (Thai): *Wai* is the Thai form of greeting. The palms of the hands are placed together and raised to below the chin, half way up the face or to the forehead depending on the status of the person being greeted. It may also be an act of worship, in which case the hands are raised to the forehead.

Wat (Thai): *Wat* is the common Thai word for the Buddhist temple.

⁹ Bhikkhu Khantipalo, *The Wheel of Birth and Death, The Wheel Publication No. 147/148/149* (Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1970), 7, 20.

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